

Blessington

Town Centre First Plan

November 2023



Document control

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Project
Blessington Town Centre First Plan

Client
Wicklow County Council

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Introduction

1 Introduction

Introduction

“This is about delivering on the objectives of ‘Our Rural Future’ and ensuring our towns have the right plan in place to tackle the issues of dereliction, vacant properties, and above all, to become better places to live, work and run a business.”

Heather Humphreys TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development

Background

In December 2021, Blessington - the fifth largest town in Wicklow - was selected as one of 26 towns to develop a Town Centre First (TCF) Plan. Town Centre First is the Government's policy strategy to support the rejuvenation of Irish rural town centres and halt their decline.

The initiative is a key part of *Our Rural Future* - the Government's ambitious five-year strategy designed to reimagine and revitalise Rural Ireland and is backed up by the Town Centre First Policy, a co-ordinated, whole-of-government approach to regenerate and revitalise Irish towns and villages.

Study Area

The Study Area for Blessington's TCF Plan comprises the town centre as defined by Wicklow County Council (WCC) and shown on the accompanying layout.

The town centre comprises development along Main Street (N81), sections of Kilbride Road and Newtown Square. Development along Main Street and Kilbride Street is more historic in character, reflected in the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) designation, whilst areas in the north west of the town centre have developed during the last 15 - 20 years. Blessington Lake lies outside of the study area to the south east.

Strategic direction which ensures compact and sustainable growth is a key consideration of the TCF Plan.



Blessington TCF Study Area

Location

Blessington is located approximately 27 km south of Dublin and is situated on the national primary road N-81 which connects Dublin to Tullow. It is Wicklow's fifth largest town, located within 10km of Naas in the north west and Tallaght, 17km to the north east.

In terms of public transport, Blessington is served by the following bus services and routes:

- 65 operated by Dublin Bus
- 884 operated by TFI
- 132 operated by Bus Éireann
- 183 operated by TFI.

There is no railway service available in Blessington, however, historically a steam tramway operated between Dublin and Blessington between 1888 & 1932.

Blessington is 223m above sea level and situated within the rolling landscape of the Wicklow Mountains. The town nestles neatly between the hills of Knockieran and Butterhill to the west and the Glen Ding Wood and Deerpark Hills to the east.

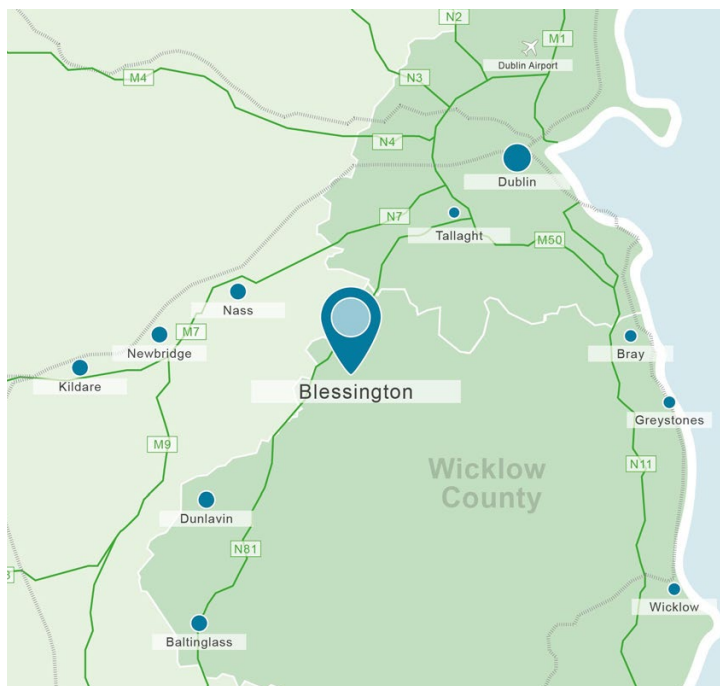
Blessington Lake (also known as Poulaphouca Reservoir) is manmade, stretching 20 square kilometres and fed by the River Liffey.

This site is a Special Protection Area (Site Code 004063) and home to the Greylag Goose. It also provides a natural boundary and feature whilst limiting the urban sprawl and growth eastwards.

The surrounding landscape predominantly supports agricultural activity and grazing livestock with a pattern of small and medium-sized fields bounded by hedgerows and some mature tree belts.



Blessington location

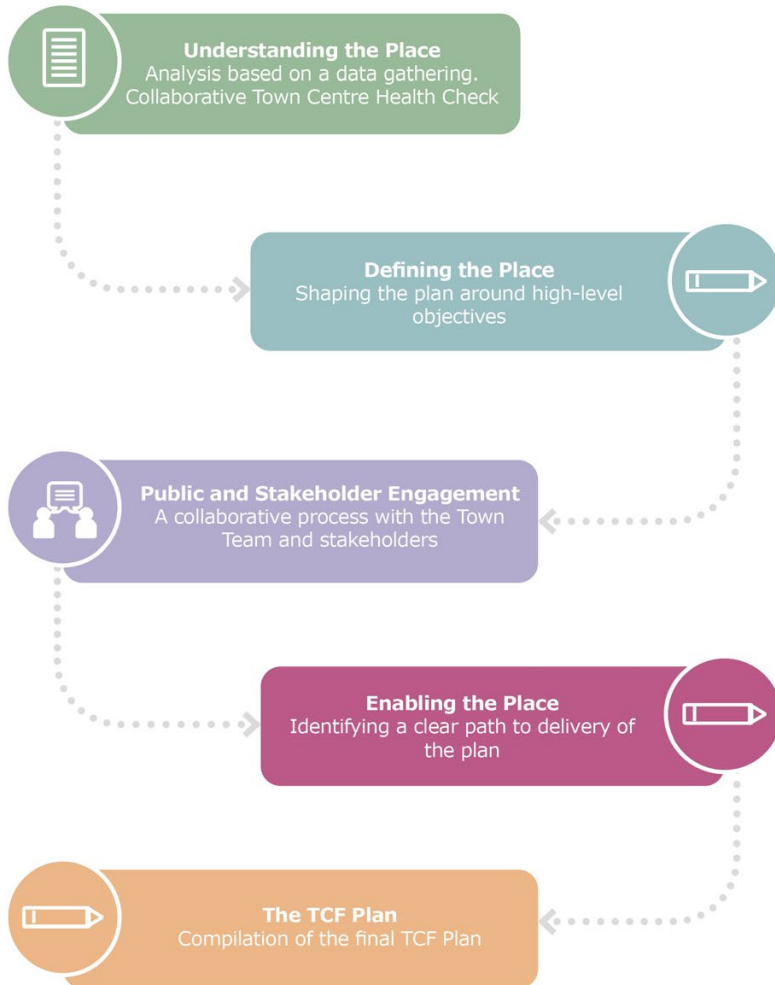


Regional plan

Structure of the report

Approach

The TCF Policy sets out a staged methodology for the production of a TCF Plan, which is set out below diagrammatically.



Report Structure

The TCF Plan is set out in two parts in order to promote better wayfinding and ease of use.

Part One sets the scene for the Blessington TCF Plan and contains all baseline information relating to Stage 1 of the TCF Plan methodology, Understanding the Place.

Information includes:

- Background to Town Centre First Policy
- National, regional and local planning policy
- An overview of public consultation and how it has impacted the development of the Plan.
- Two phases of the Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) produced in 2019 and 2020 respectively (document appendices).
- Useful updates to information from the 2020 Health Check, to better inform the TCF Plan.

Part Two is the TCF Action Plan which contains all information relating to Stages 2 and 3 of the TCF Plan methodology, Defining the Place and Enabling the Place. It is the key visioning output document to be utilised by WCC, local landowners and developers, businesses and community groups as a blueprint for the town's development.

Part 2 content comprises:

- Blessington's Town Centre First Vision, themes and objectives
- Long list of Identified Opportunities
- Opportunity Overview Plan
- A focus on each shortlisted Opportunity
- Delivery Plan.

Introduction

Town Centre First

Town Centre First (TCF) is the Government's policy strategy aimed at supporting the rejuvenation of Irish rural town centres and the creation of town centres which "function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community".

As a part of the national planning policy guidance document entitled 'Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025', the TCF Policy Approach sets out a path for how rural towns can adapt to the challenges they are facing and utilise the tools available to them to enhance and regenerate their towns. Phase One of the Town Centre First – A Policy Approach for Irish Towns programme, identifies Blessington as a town for which a Town Centre First Plan will be developed in 2023.

Designed as an 'enabling framework' TCF focuses on tailored solutions, designed and implemented by local communities, and supported by both the local and national government. The figure, seen below, illustrates what the outcomes of a Town Centre First strategy should be. The figure seen to the right, demonstrates what makes a successful town centre as determined by the policy framework.

A TCF Strategy Should Create a Town That Is:



The desired outcomes of the TCF plan making process. Source: The TCF Policy Framework

The Town Centre First policy recognises that successful places:

- Are characterised by an attractive public realm (streets, spaces and parks) that is designed to invite people to meet, mingle and dwell;
- Contain a variety of services/shops that provide employment opportunities, enable people to shop locally and meet the needs of the local community;
- Provide a range of cultural, recreational and community spaces (that includes scope for periodic events and festivals) that bring together community members and attract visitors/tourists;
- Contain a well maintained building stock that creates visual interest and animates streets and spaces;
- Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity;
- Are attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop;
- Are well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport, enabling a high proportion of journeys to be made by foot and/or bicycle from the immediate hinterland (e.g. the '10 minute town' concept);
- Manage traffic within central areas so that streets prioritise vulnerable users (pedestrians and cyclists), enabling them to move about safely and in comfort;
- Provide a mix of housing typologies and tenures to cater for diverse communities in terms of age, income and mobility;
- Utilise digital technology to enhance the experience of living and working in towns, enabling greater choices in terms of location and lifestyle;
- Provide opportunities for the amenity, health and well-being of residents, workers and visitors.

Qualities of successful places identified by the TCF Framework, Source: TCF Policy Framework.

As set out in the Town Centre First – A Policy Approach for Irish Towns document, the TCF Plan Process outlines what National, Regional, Local Policy and Best Practice Guidelines the Plan should be informed by, what the Plan will include in respect of Analysis and Appraisal of the town, the objectives going forward for the town and the strategy and actions stemming from those objectives, and how the Plan will be prepared and implemented by key personnel and enabled by funding and investment into the detailed plans and projects.

Each Town Centre First Plan will be underpinned by a Town Centre Health Check, a data gathering exercise and assessment of the current position of the town, national, regional and local planning policy and best-practice guidance and informed by case studies from similar towns.

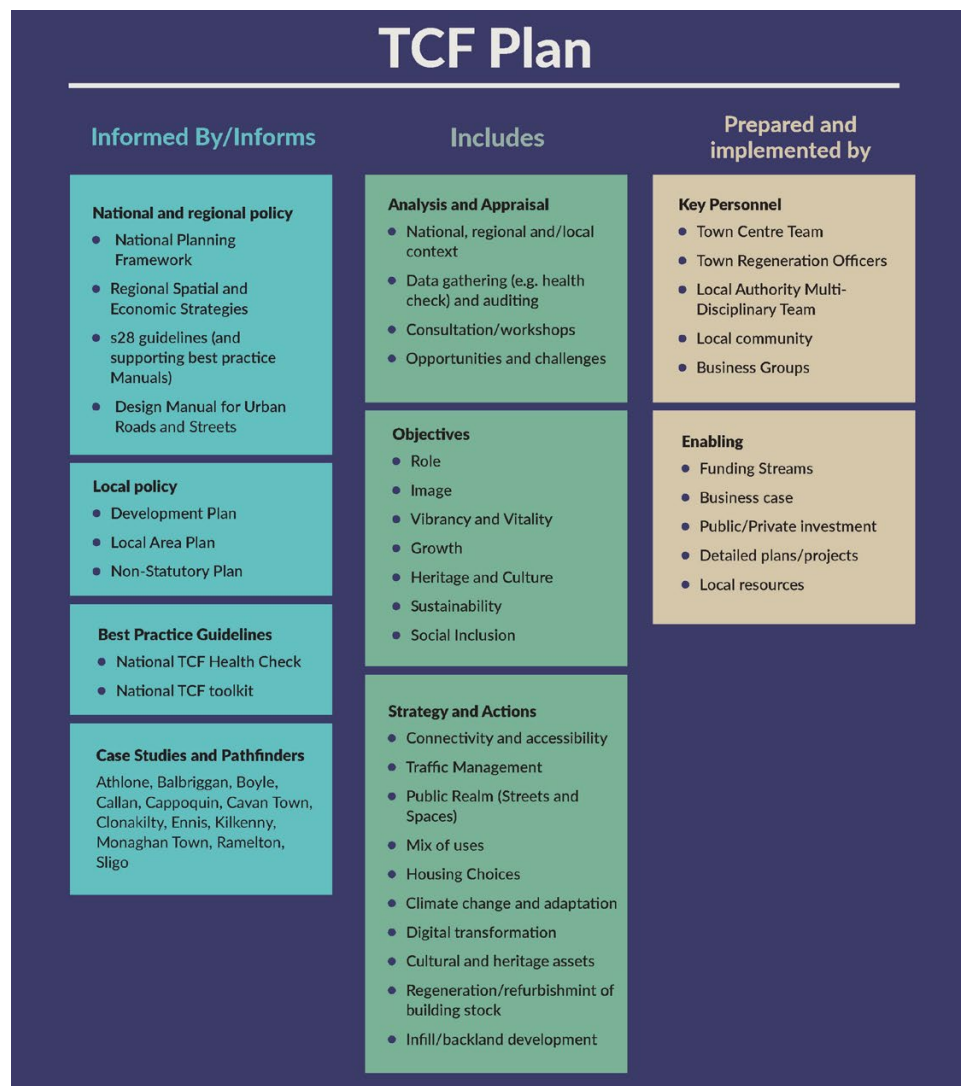
These plans will include the analysis and appraisal of the town, the objectives for the town, and the strategy and actions proposed to bring the outlined objectives to life. The Plan developed will provide an overall vision for the future direction of the town (Chapter 6 of the *Town Centre First – A Policy Approach* document). These Plans, while not statutory documents, once adopted, will become part of the local planning policy and provide a direction for planning policy at the local level alongside the extant Development Plan.

The creation of this Plan provides an opportunity to set a bold and imaginative precedent for how to transform and rejuvenate the town of Blessington. As a result, the process of constructing this Plan has been comprehensive, seeking to incorporate the desires and needs of the community and make it into the highest quality possible path for the town to follow. The process sought to take a bottom-up approach to developing policy and identify local needs based off engagement and consultation with the local community of Blessington.

The results of this process have been incorporated into the foundation of the Plan and carried through each chapter and proposal set out in Part Two of this Plan.

The main product of the Plan is the development of Objectives and Projects for the enhancement and revitalisation of the town which will help to frame planning policy for Blessington Town Centre going forward and can be utilised by the community in the future. These Objectives and Projects seek to address the broad issues and desires raised during the consultation process, and come together to inform this community driven vision for the town.

In turn, objectives are supported by achievable, measurable, and clear actions that have been identified, in Part Two, to steer forward the objectives and vision of the Plan. These actions serve as a benchmark to identify the progress of enacting the Plan and its goals, as well as providing guidelines for proceeding on the journey of revitalising the town centre. They also seek to address targeted topics and issues brought up and discussed during the public consultation and data collection process. Each objective and opportunity identified in Part Two of the Plan are informed by and assessed against the relevant policy and guidelines, later in the Plan.



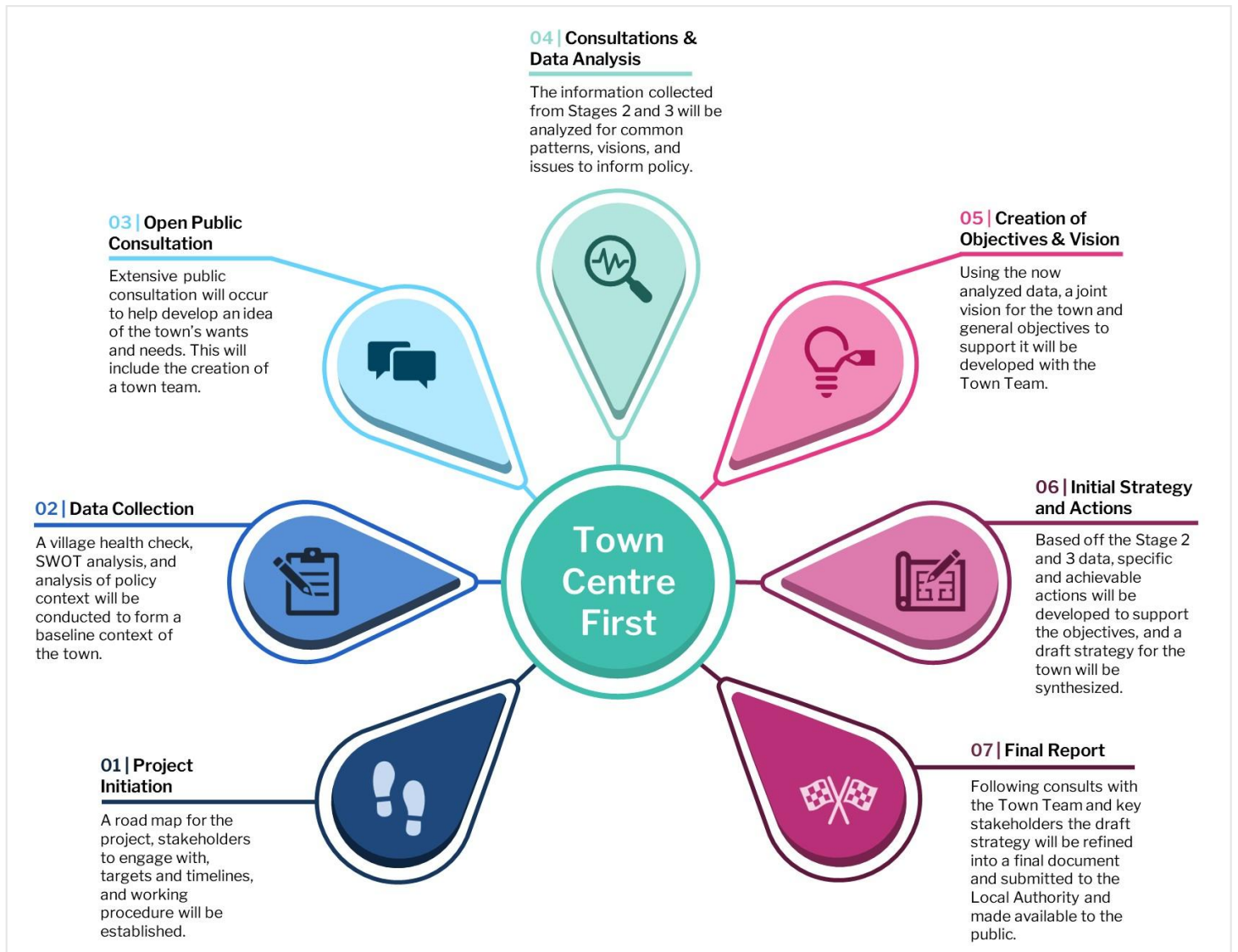
Elements of the Plan Creation Process Source: TCF Policy Framework.

The framework provided by the plan is one that is durable, but flexible, and capable of supporting the changing needs of the Blessington community. As a whole the creation of this Town Centre First Plan for Blessington hopes to herald a new era for the town and its future, as well as for rural towns in Ireland as a whole.



Above: The TCF Policy Framework

Below: The Blessington TCF creation process as conducted by MKO.



Part One



2 Understanding the Place

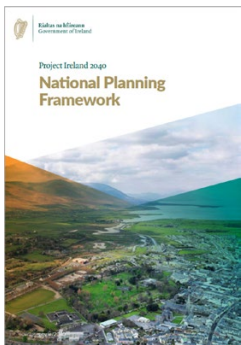
Planning Policy Review

National Policy

Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040 is the 20-year plan for developing Ireland and ensuring that it remains a vibrant and economically successful place to live. It is comprised of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP).

The National Planning Framework



The National Planning Framework (NPF) outlines the strategic vision and strategy for Ireland over the next 20 years. It sets out ten National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) to define the priorities and benefits to be delivered over the

course of the plan. The NSOs are supported by National Policy Objectives (NPOs) that contain targeted goals to achieve the vision set out in the NSOs.

The NSOs and associated NPOs in the figure to the right are of key relevance and importance to the Blessington Town Centre First Plan.

The National Development Plan

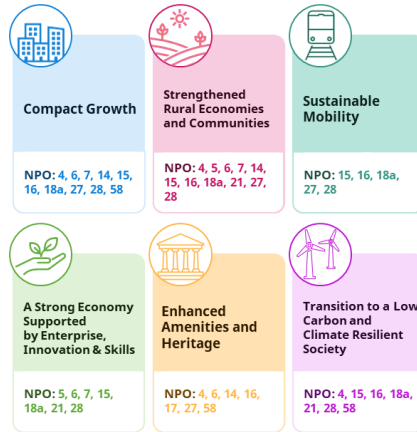
The National Development Plan (NDP) is the strategic investment plan for the infrastructure and services needed to achieve the NPF. The first NDP runs from 2021-2030.

Investment for the town comes from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), which allocated approximately €1 million for public realm, the redevelopment of derelict property, an



ehub and visitor centre for the proposed greenway.

This plan strives to reinvigorate and maximise the opportunities within the town centre so that it can be enjoyed by residents, businesses and visitors.



Above: NSO's from the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the numbers of associated key NPOs relevant to this TCF Plan.

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 is Ireland's rural development policy for the 2021-2025 period. At its core, it seeks to create a rural Ireland that:

- Is integral to the national whole,
- Has increased interdependence between rural and urban places,
- Has the potential to create quality work,
- Has high quality environments, and
- Is vibrant with local people and communities at its heart.

The strategy seeks improvements in several key areas including digital connectivity, employment and careers, revitalization of towns and villages, improved resilience, and leadership in local communities, enhanced public services, and climate action.

Town Centre First: A Policy Approach to Irish Towns

As part of Our Rural Future, *Town Centre First* (TCF) policy seeks to provide local communities and Local Authorities a toolkit to achieve the goals set out in the Our Rural Future policy document, while giving communities the opportunity to drive the process and shape their own towns.

Climate Action Plan 2023

The *Climate Action Plan 2023* (CAP) is an update to the *Climate Action Plan 2019* and sets our refreshed measures to help Ireland achieve its legal binding emissions targets under international and European law. Under the plan, Ireland is seeking to reduce its transport emissions 50%, its commercial building emissions 45%, residential building emissions 40%, and businesses emissions 35% by 2030.

In order to achieve these targets, it acknowledges a redesign and remodeling of our cities, towns, and villages is needed. The promotion of more sustainable forms of travel, bringing building stocks up to a higher standard, supporting more sustainable ways of doing business and ensuring long-term economic sustainability are both essential to meeting these targets, as well as improving the quality of life in of our towns and cities.

Heritage Ireland 2030

Heritage Ireland 2030 is the plan to protect and promote Ireland's local and national heritage. Built around three themes, communities, leadership, and partnerships, the strategy suggests 150 actions to ensure the protection of Ireland's heritage in all of its forms. The core of the strategy is an acknowledgement of Ireland's heritage as being at the core of its identity, having both an intrinsic and economic value. Both natural and built heritage are addressed in the strategy, and methods for communities to get involved in their protection are advanced.

The Digital Connectivity Strategy (2022)

Recognizing the importance of access to digital services towards the wider development of Ireland's economy, the Digital Connectivity Strategy sets out the policies and supports available to ensure every community has access to the internet and its benefits. The strategy acknowledges that a high-quality internet service is essential to the development of rural towns and villages and commits to rolling it out to support both the local economy and provision of smart services.

Regional Policy

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region (2020-2032)

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) is a statutory document that sets out the physical and economic development priorities for each of Ireland's three regions. The primary statutory objective of the Strategy is to support implementation of Project Ireland 2040 - which links planning and investment through the National Planning Framework (NPF) and ten-year National Development Plan (NDP) - and the economic and climate policies of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the Region.



The RSES identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and provides policy responses in the form of Regional Policy Objectives. At this strategic level it provides a policy framework for investment to meet current and future needs in the Region.

The RSES provides:

- **Spatial Strategy** – to manage future growth and ensure the creation of healthy and attractive places to live and work.
- **Economic Strategy** – that builds on our strengths to create a strong economy and jobs, that ensures a good living standard and economic opportunity for all.
- **Climate Action Strategy** – to accelerate action and ensure a clean and healthy environment, sustainable transport and green infrastructure.
- **Investment Framework** – to prioritise the delivery of infrastructure and enabling services by government and state agencies.

The RSES is broken down into Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) that seek to guide the region towards achieving the vision set out. The figure below sets out the common themes in the RPOs relevant to the Blessington TCF, with the relevant RPO's listed below each.

Spatial Strategy

RPOs: 3.2, 3.3, 6.11, 6.12, 6.13, 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 9.10, 9.12, 9.13, 9.14, 9.15, 9.27, 9.30

Economic Strategy

RPOs: 3.5, 9.24

Climate Action Strategy

RPOs: 3.7, 6.1, 7.23, 7.35, 7.42, 7.7

Investment Framework

RPOs: 6.14, 6.21

Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024

The Regional Enterprise Plans represent a 'bottom-up, collaborative mechanism' to help deliver balanced regional growth with a coherent policy approach. The plans were made in collaboration and consultation with stakeholders from across economic industries and sectors.

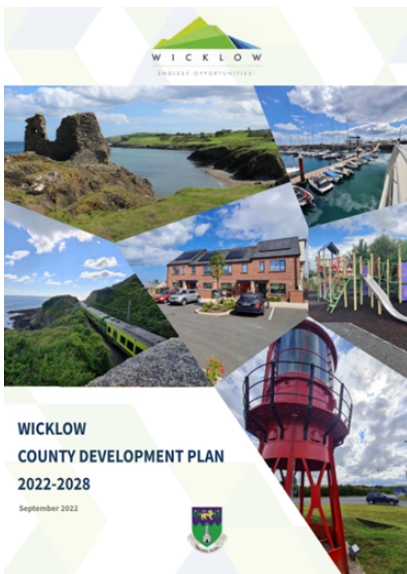


The ambition of the new Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan is focused on building upon the region's past successes while working collaboratively around areas of commonality within the Mid-East to build an innovative, forward-looking region. The Plan will also aim to create a sense of regional identity while respecting the region's diversity and position the region at the forefront of addressing the difficulties presented by COVID-19 and embrace the challenges of climate action and digitalisation.

Local Policy

Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028

The Wicklow County Development Plan (WCDP) sets out a strategic spatial framework for the proper planning and sustainable development of County Wicklow for the period between 2022 and 2028. While the Plan is in place for a six year period, it is framed having regard to the long term development objectives of the County beyond 2028. This new plan sets out the statutory planning framework for the entire County, with a focus on the strategic planning and sustainable development of the County.



Blessington is identified as a level 3 ‘Self Sustaining Growth Town’ settlement in the WCDP, where there is a targeted growth rater of 25%-30% with slight variations based on capacity / past trends. The population of the settlement is targeted to increase from 5,234 in 2016 to 6,145 by Q2 2028.

The Development Plan Strategy is guided by three strategic principles - **Healthy Placemaking, Climate Action** and **Economic Opportunity**.

Healthy Placemaking aims to ensure the creation of vibrant, active places that contribute to people’s well-being and overall quality of life.

CPOs: 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10, 5.11, 5.12, 5.14, 5.16, 5.17, 5.18, 5.19, 5.21, 5.22, 5.23, 7.1, 7.2, 7.8, 8.10, 8.13, 8.14, 8.16, 8.18, 8.25, 10.2, 10.9, 10.19, 11.2, 11.3, 12.2, 12.11, 12.12, 12.13, 12.14, 12.17, 12.21, 12.44, 18.5

Climate Action refers to the need to take urgent measures to address the climate crisis via the reduction of emissions and the introduction of mitigation and adaptation projects.

CPOs: 9.21, 12.1, 12.6, 12.7, 12.18, 16.01, 16.03, 16.09, 16.15, 17.1, 17.16, 18.1, 18.2

Economic Opportunity aims to support sustainable economic development in the area by championing local businesses, attracting new employers, and ensuring a positive environment for investment.

CPOs: 5.6, 5.7, 9.1, 9.2, 9.7, 9.12, 10.3, 10.8, 11.1

Blessington is identified as a level 3 ‘Self Sustaining Growth Town’ settlement in the WCDP, where there is a targeted growth rater of 25%-30% with slight variations based on capacity / past trends. The population of the settlement is targeted to increase from 5,234 in 2016 to 6,145 by Q2 2028.

There is not currently a Local Area Plan (LAP) in place for the settlement of Blessington following the expiration of the previous LAP in 2019. It is proposed that new Local Area Plans (LAPs) will be made for 5 no. key settlements in the period 2022-2024. These plans will be made in order of priority:

1. Wicklow Town – Rathnew
2. Greystones - Delgany - Kilcoole
- 3. Blessington**
4. Arklow and Environs
5. Bray Municipal District (including Enniskerry and Kilmacanogue)

While each LAP will cover a period of 6 years, zoning will be provided on the basis of the land needed to meet the 2031 population target, with clear objectives to ensure 2026 targets can be reached.

Wicklow County Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019

The Climate Adaptation Strategy for County Wicklow developed by Wicklow County Council under the guidance of the Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) is a response to the impact of climate change.

The Strategy addresses how Wicklow County Council as an organisation responds to the impacts of Climate Change.

The actions of this strategy have been developed to close the gap between the current baselines with associated responses, projected risks and the resultant actions that will be required to deal with increased impact as well as preventive measures that can build resilience. The actions are set in a framework of six key themes with an overarching goal for each theme. These themes include:

1. Local Adaption Governance and Business Operations
2. Infrastructure and Built Environment
3. Land Use and Development
4. Drainage and flood Management
5. Natural Resources and Cultural Infrastructure
6. Community Health and Wellbeing

Draft Climate Action Plan 2024-2029

Wicklow County Council's Draft Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 has been prepared to facilitate the transition of Wicklow County Council's services and operations to a low carbon resilient future, leading by example and mobilizing engagement countywide. This will be achieved by delivering and promoting best practice in climate action at local level. This aim is aligned to the Government’s overall National Climate Objective, which seeks to pursue and achieve, by no later than the end of 2050, the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy.

The draft plan sets out how Wicklow County Council will be responsible for enhancing climate resilience, increasing energy efficiency, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, across its own assets, services, and infrastructure, for which it is fully accountable, whilst also demonstrating a broader role of influencing, advocating, and facilitating other sectors, to meet their own climate targets and ambitions.

Wicklow County Council Climate Action Team will lead the implementation of the Climate Action Plan and the council will work collaboratively and in partnership with a range of key stakeholders to support its delivery. The adoption of the Local Authority Climate Action Plan is a reserved function and the final plan will be considered by the Elected Members of Wicklow County Council at their meeting in December 2023.

Public Consultation Overview & Approach

Public consultation for the Blessington TCF Plan took place in August to October 2023 and was a collaborative effort involving Wicklow County Council, LUC, MKO and members of the established Blessington Town Team.

The aim of the public consultation process was to gather the views and opinions of the people who live, work, and do business in Blessington as to how they feel the centre of their town could be improved. This approach is in keeping with the stated aims of the government's Town Centre First policy, which seeks to place local communities and local businesses at the centre of the process of re-imagining their own towns and planning their own futures.

Public Consultation Timeline

- In August 2023, a Public Consultation web page was developed by WCC through which consultation events and surveys were advertised.
- In early September 2023, a stakeholder engagement event was held in the town centre, making full use of the public realm space fronting the Credit Union building. The consultation featured a pop-up play event run by the local sports partnership in the town square. The aim was to drive engagement, particularly from families and young people. Surveys were handed out during the event.
- Surveys for business owners, residents and consumers were circulated via the Public Consultation webpage and the Blessington Town Team. Hard copies were made available in local council offices. The objective was to elicit views and opinions on the current state of affairs in the town centre and encourage suggestions for projects the TCF plan should prioritise.
- In October 2023, an in-person Public Consultation Event was held in the town, to allow the local community to view the progress of the TCF plans and again offer their views, opinions and suggestions.

Surveys

Two distinct surveys were designed as part of the first phase of consultation. These were:

- **A Business Owners' survey** – to be circulated among business owners in the town with a focus on the commercial health of Blessington.
- **A Residents' survey** – to be circulated amongst the general public of the town including residents, consumers, workers, etc, with a focus on how Blessington could be improved as a place in which to live, work and spend time.

These two surveys went live on the Wicklow County Council website in early September 2023 (see [here](#)). They were advertised via the County Council's social media platforms and were also featured in the local media (see [here](#).) The surveys remained live for a period of six weeks, closing on Saturday, October 21st. The surveys generated an exceptional response. In all, 188 surveys were submitted over the course of the six weeks.

Of these, 30 were Business Owners' surveys and 158 were Residents' surveys. The responses contained within the completed surveys offered valuable insights into the perceptions of Blessington held by those who live, work and do business in the town on a daily basis. These would go on to form a core element of the final TCF plan.

Public Consultation Event

The second phase of the public consultation process was an in-person event, hosted in the town over the course of a day, to allow members of the public to come and view the progress of the plans, meet and speak directly with members of the project team and again offer their views and opinions on the direction the TCF plan should take.

It was decided through discussions between WCC, LUC and MKO to host the event on Friday, October 27th, between 10am and 4pm. The venue chosen for the event was the Blessington Library.

The event was promoted through several channels in the locality – an advertisement was taken out in the local newspaper, the *Wicklow People*, and the event also featured in an online news article (see [here](#)) which was shared widely in the days leading up to the event. Posters advertising the event were printed and placed at prominent locations around the town by members of the Town Team, who also reached out via their own word-of-mouth networks to encourage as many members of the local community as possible to attend.

Blessington Town Centre First Plan Public Consultation

Friday 27th October
Blessington Library

We would like to invite you to an exhibition outlining the progress of the Blessington Town Centre First Plan

This will be held at Blessington Library on **Friday 27th October, from 10am to 4pm**

Members from the design team and Blessington Town Team will be in attendance to discuss the ongoing planning process with the community

All are welcome and feedback is encouraged

The materials presented to the public at the event consisted of large A1-sized posters displayed along the walls of the library. The posters contained information on:

- the background to the Town Centre First policy and how Blessington had been selected as Wicklow's representative amongst the initial 26 'pathfinder' towns.
- summarised results of the surveys, which had been completed, collated and analysed in the week prior to the event.
- results of the Land Use Survey, which had been carried out earlier in 2023 to update a pre-existing survey from the 2019 Health Check.
- the overall vision for the Blessington TCF Plan, and the objectives it hopes to achieve in areas including accessibility, community, the urban realm, the economy and the natural environment.
- how a pipeline of projects would be delivered, from the long-list through to the completed TCF Plan.
- some potential project opportunities which had already been identified, and how they might be brought to fruition through the TCF Plan. These included projects such as strategic transport assessments, a public realm strategy, placemaking projects, the creation of a green space network, and methods of supporting and boosting the local economy.
- some potential project opportunities which had already been identified, and how they might be brought to fruition through the TCF Plan. These included projects such as strategic transport assessments, a public realm strategy, placemaking projects, the creation of a green space network, and methods of supporting and boosting the local economy.

The event was manned by representatives of WCC, including the Town Regeneration Officer who has primary responsibility for the delivery of the plan, and by members of the planning and communications teams from MKO. Members of the Town Team were also in attendance to lend their support at various times of the day.

The event was very well-attended – more than 120 members of the Blessington community visited over the course of the day to view the exhibits and speak to the project team. Written feedback was encouraged, either through the use of 'sticky-notes' to be adhered to one of the wall-mounted posters or through the comment sheets provided.

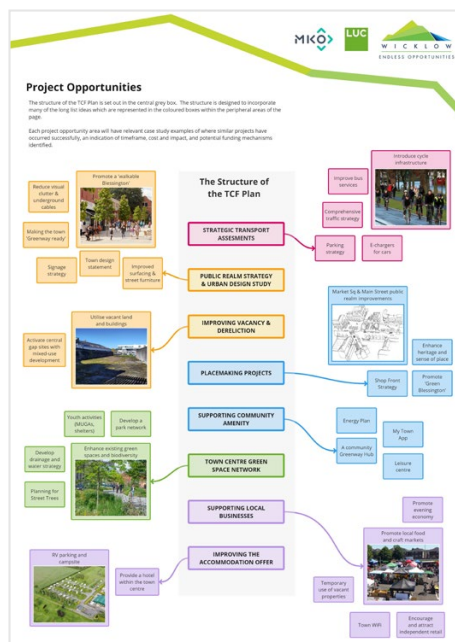
Blessington Town Team

In 2017, Blessington was selected as "Leinster's Most Enterprising Town" in the Bank of Ireland Awards Scheme. In order to build on this well-received acknowledgement of the work of so many individuals, groups and businesses this award was used as the catalyst for the establishment of Blessington Town Team.

The Blessington Town Team is a collaboration between the public sector (Wicklow County Council, education sector, Garda Síochána) and the private sector (Blessington and District Community Forum, Blessington Tidy Towns and Blessington Business Network).

The Town Team has been instrumental in the development of the Town Centre First Plan. The Team comprises the following members:

- John Horan
- Jason Mulhall
- Liam Cullen
- Michael Doyle
- Cllr Patsy Glennon
- Cllr Edward Timmins
- Cllr Avril Cronin
- Cllr Vincent Blake
- Cllr Gerry O'Neill
- Cllr John Mullen
- Carmel Cashin
- Michael Sargent
- Kilian McGreal.



Excerpt from Public Consultation artwork



Site walkaround in Blessington with the Town Team during the TCF Plan process

Collaborative Town Centre Health Check



Introduction

Aim of the CTCHC

This report summarises the key findings from the 15-step Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) Programme methodology, developed by the Heritage Council and its partners.

The key findings from Blessington's CTCHC and baseline data will inform plans and strategies in relation to the following:

- Arts, Cultural Tourism, e.g. music, food, etc.
- Climate change adaptation
- Commerce / E Commerce and Enterprise
- Enabling infill development
- Heritage-led Regeneration
- Living in the Town Centre
- Public Realm, e.g. historic streetscapes, parks and public spaces
- Renewable Energy / Energy Harvesting
- Strategic Planning and Place-making.



15-step CTCHC Process. Source: Heritage Council

Approach

The CTCHC for Blessington has been undertaken in two phases across 2019 - 2020.

The CTCHC research focuses on a number of key areas:

- Land use in the town centre
- Consumers' opinions and attitudes
- Business owners' attitude toward the town centre
- Footfall in the historic town centre
- Movement and accessibility.

These reports can be found in **Appendices A and B**.

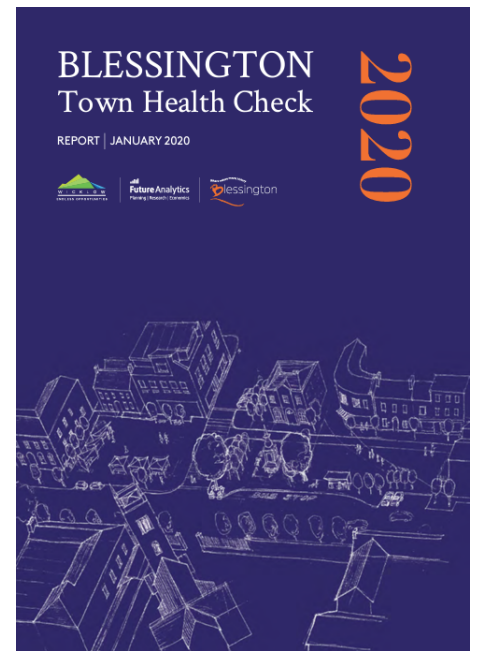
Appendix C features additional planning policy information.

It was considered appropriate to review and update some elements within these reports, taking into account updated baseline data such as the 2022 census results and more recent public consultation data.

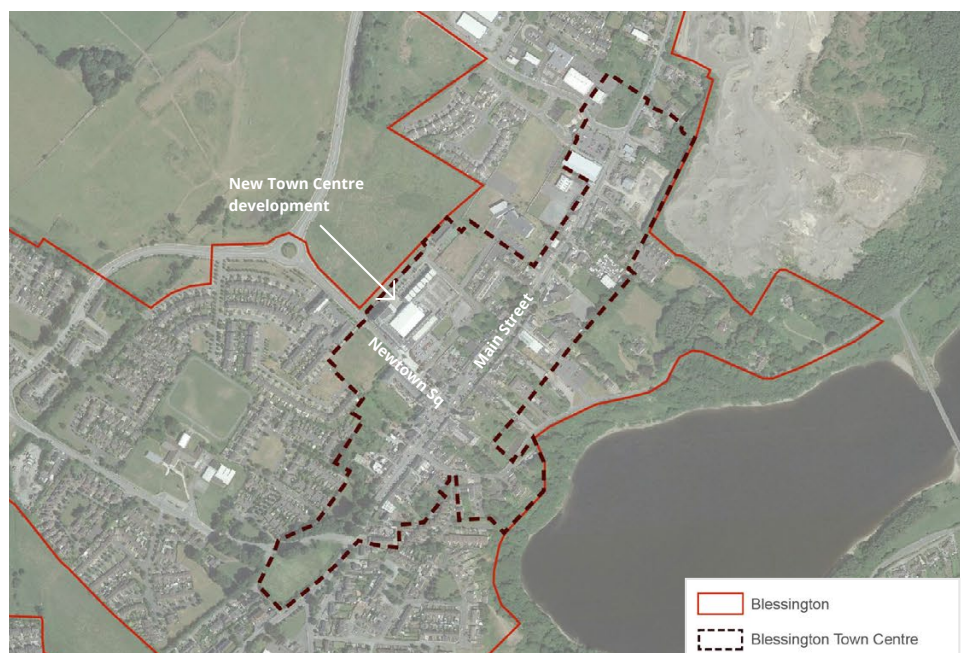
Summary plans are also provided in order to provide an easy-to-access context for the projects set out in the Action Plan. This information is set out across the following pages.

Study Area

The Study Area for the CTCHC comprises the town centre as defined by Wicklow County Council (WCC) and is shown on the accompanying layout.



Blessington Town Health Check Report (2020)



Blessington TCF Study Area

Survey Methodology

Changing demographics, lifestyles, travel to work patterns and consumer preferences are all impacting on the vitality and viability of our historic town centres.

This summary report presents up-to-date research that will help inform our response to these challenges through existing and future operational programmes that support heritage-led urban and rural regeneration.

Blessington's CTCHC updates were undertaken during 2023, following the recommended 15-Step Methodology set out by the CTCHC Programme.

Public Stakeholder & Business Surveys

Local stakeholders - including community members, visitors to the town and local businesses - were encouraged to undertake surveys to understand opinion and key issues.

Surveys were advertised on a 'Blessington TCF Plan' Wicklow County Council online hub and promoted via a TCF Plan-focused stakeholder engagement event in the town during August 2023 and via the on-going presence of the Town Team.

Businesses were engaged with on a face-to-face basis, via representatives from the Blessington Town Team. A total of 30 responses to the Business Owners' survey were received. The businesses who responded varied in size, scale and longevity in the town, but a number of common themes emerged when their surveys were collectively analysed.

A total of 158 responses to the Residents' survey were received, from which some key trends were identified. The public at large was relatively consistent in their responses and reviews of the town.

Surveys were available online, via the web page and in paper, at the local Council offices.

Land Use Surveys

LUC collected survey data on the vitality and vibrancy of the historic town centre for a land-use survey, which examined the use of ground floor space in the core town centre area. This core area covered all streets within the town centre. The land use data was verified on site.

The survey was conducted in September 2023 and uses were classified using the GOAD Classification of Land Use. The land use findings were peer reviewed in November 2023.

Movement Surveys

Movement surveys, assessing pedestrian footfall and town centre parking audits were conducted as part of the Phase 2 CTCHC.

It is recommended that a traffic count and pedestrian footfall survey information is updated, analysing a period of at least 7 days to determine the areas of high and low flow along key routes and junctions.

It is also recommended that the town centre parking audits is updated to assess town centre car parking areas every 30 mins. Camera surveys would assist in understanding how the existing parking bays are utilised (by whom, length of stay, etc).

Business Owners' Opinion of Blessington Town Centre

Main advantages for businesses in Blessington?

'A supportive local community'

'Free convenient parking'

'Footfall and active streets make a vibrant town'

Blessington's Unique Selling Point

- Proximity to Nature/Surrounding Landscape
- Proximity to Dublin
- Greenway being developed
- Community Spirit/Friendliness

DO YOU SELL ONLINE?



83.3%

of respondents have a website



26.6%

of respondents sell online



2.6%

of respondents planning to sell online

Main challenges for businesses in Blessington?

'Traffic congestion/ mis-management'

'High rates'

'Lack of retail variety'

'Lack of parking'

'Anti-social behaviour'

'Lack of banking services'

What changes would you want to see in Blessington?

'Improve public realm and provide better maintenance'

'Addition of amenities and activities'

'Encourage new businesses and increase retail variety'

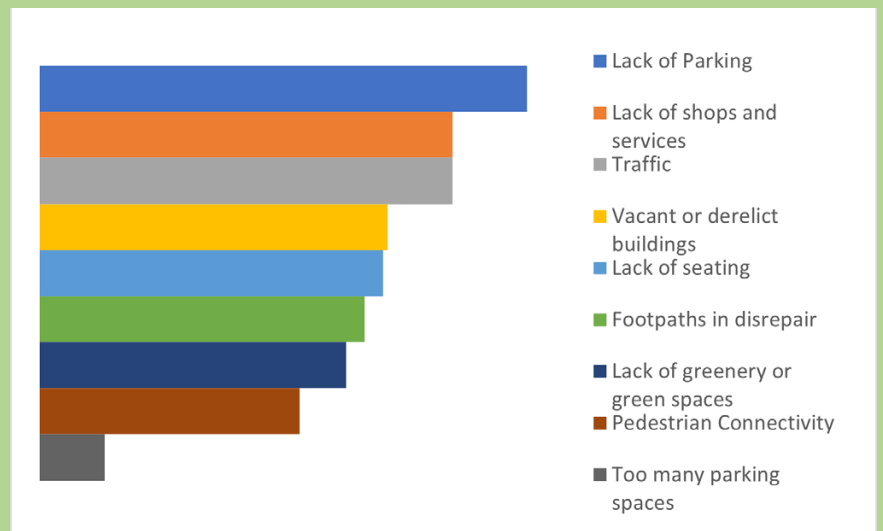
'Utilise derelict buildings'

'Additional parking and change to existing parking layout'

'Traffic management'

'Need for hotel / tourist accommodation'

What are the most important issues for businesses?



Summary:

- Lack of parking spaces as the biggest issue for businesses in Blessington, followed closely by lack of shops and services and the presence of traffic.
- Too many parking spaces was the least significant issue for businesses.
- Lack of banking noted as an issue by some respondents.

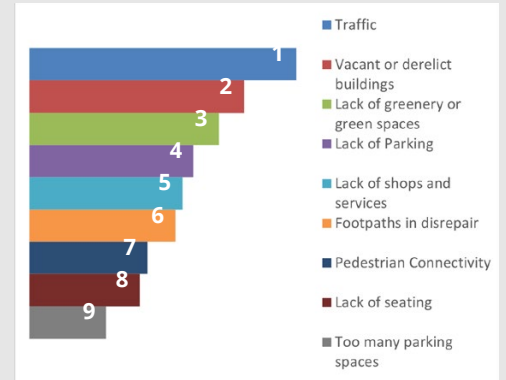
Public Opinion of Blessington Town Centre

There were **158 respondents** to the community consultation survey.

Several key trends have emerged from the public consultation on the Blessington Town Centre First Plan. The public at large was relatively consistent in their responses and reviews of the town presently. Key trends that should be examined further and be addressed where appropriate in the strategy include but are not limited to:

- **A lack of activities** and reasons to come into the town. This is particularly noticeable for teens/young people which it is believed contributes to anti-social behaviour particularly around the Dunnes Stores.
- Emerging from this, there was a strong desire to see the development of **new amenities and activities** that everyone could enjoy, including young people. In particular, there is a desire for a **swimming pool**.
- **Improvements to the public realm** are greatly desired including more bins and trees and regular maintenance of the footpaths.
- The poor quality of the public transport was frequently highlighted, and there is a strong desire to **improve the transport service**.
- **Reducing dereliction** alongside improvements to the quality of shop fronts, and seating, amongst other concerns.
- There is a notable desire to **expand the retail and service offering** in the town. In particular, there is a desire for an additional bank and a wider variety of **restaurants**.

Key problems and their importance to the community



Blessington's Unique Selling Point

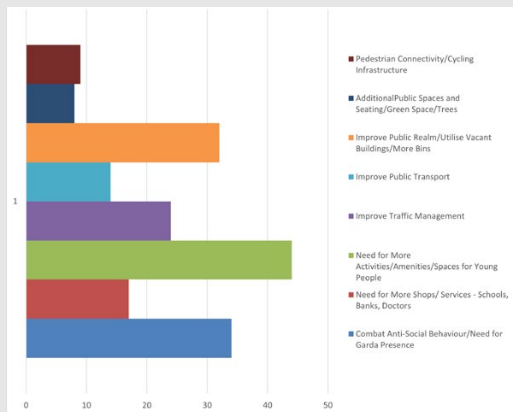
'Proximity to Nature/Beautiful Scenery/Surrounding Landscape'

'Public Realm/Built Heritage'

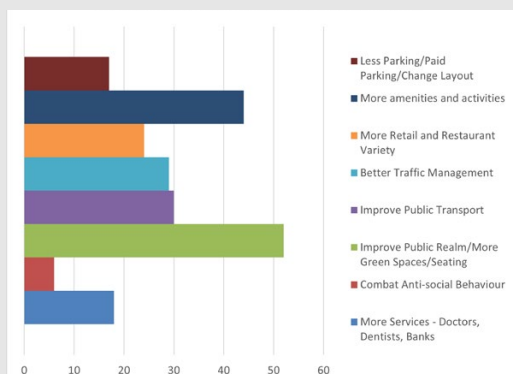
'Proximity to Dublin'

'Sense of Community/Friendliness'

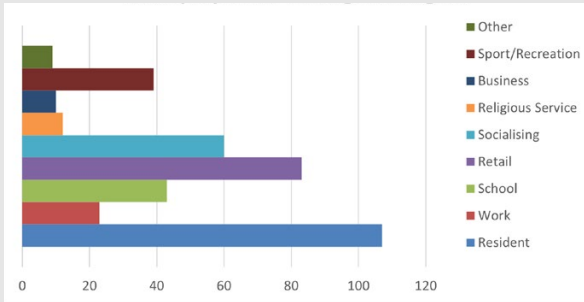
What issues facing Blessington town centre that you feel require particular attention in this Town Centre First Plan?



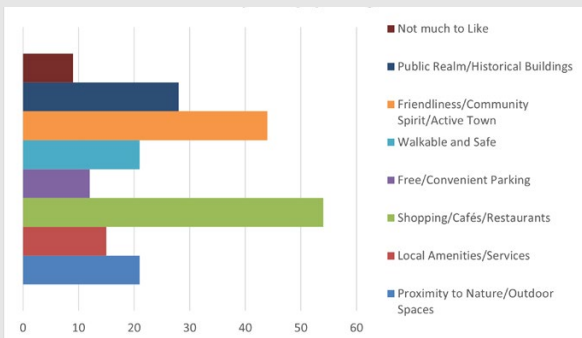
How can we make Blessington town centre a more appealing place to live, work or spend time?



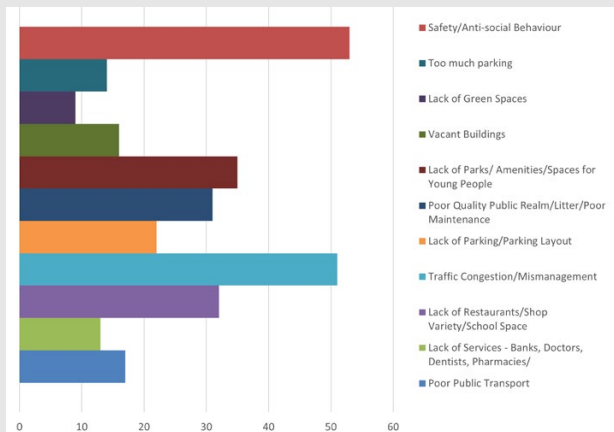
Main purpose in visiting Blessington



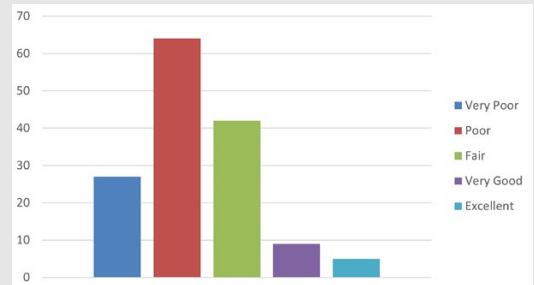
What do you enjoy doing here?



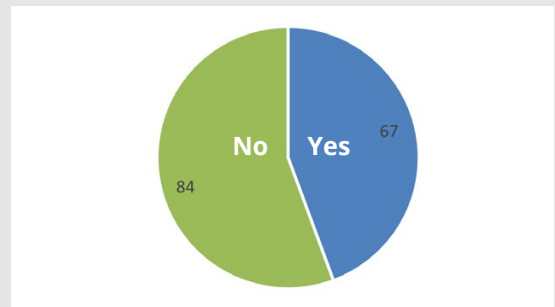
What do you not like?



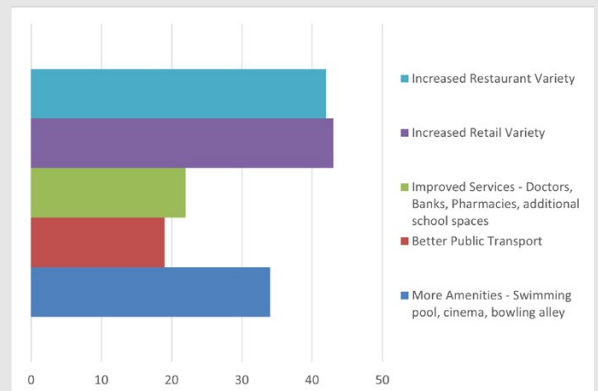
How well is the public realm performing?



As a consumer, are your needs met in Blessington?



What do you want to see more of in Blessington?



Feedback from Public Consultation

Overall, the reception at the Public Consultation Event was very positive. The members of the local community who attended were enthusiastic and engaged with the efforts to improve the centre of their town and provided meaningful and constructive feedback, both via the written channels and in their conversations with the project team.

The central themes which came through in conversations held at the Public Consultation Event were largely reflective of those which emerged from the surveys; the overarching perception of Blessington was one of a town with a vibrant community spirit and significant potential for growth, but there were concerns over the rate at which the population of the town has grown over recent decades without a corresponding expansion of facilities and amenities, particularly for young people.

Specific examples of such amenities included a swimming pool, a soccer pitch and a rugby pitch, although it was widely acknowledged that the provision of such falls outside the remit of the Town Centre First plan. The creation of a civic space or public plaza in the centre of the town was another project which received support from attendees on the day, in tandem with improving the overall condition and appearance of the footpaths and introducing more cycling infrastructure in and around the town centre.



Public consultation engagement board

Other issues which were brought up in conversation with the attendees at the event included:

- **Transport links between Blessington and Dublin city** – several attendees expressed dissatisfaction with the frequency of the Bus Éireann service between Blessington and Tallaght, which currently runs every two hours. A more frequent service would create greater accessibility between the town and Dublin city through the Luas red line.
- **Commuters parking their cars in the centre of town and taking the bus to Dublin** – car parking spaces being taken up for long periods of time during the day with little or no corresponding benefit to the businesses of the town. It was suggested that the lower floors of the town’s multi-story carpark, which are currently closed for the majority of the year, be made available for long-term parking.
- **The one-way system in place to the south and west of Dunnes Stores** – concerns were expressed that this one-way system is poorly signposted and that cars regularly turn the wrong way down the street, which is used for pedestrian connectivity between the centre of the town and the adjacent childcare centre and St Mary’s National School.
- **The need for accommodation** – the lack of accommodation for tourists was cited as a major issue for Blessington, particularly given the growth in visitor numbers which is anticipated with the development of the Blessington Greenway.
- **The absence of a dedicated facility for the arts** - It was suggested that one of the vacant town centre buildings, such as the former Ulster Bank, could be acquired and repurposed into a centre for art exhibitions, theatre, music, etc.

Conclusion

The public consultation process has played an important role in the formation of the TCF Plan for Blessington. The project team was conscious of the need to ensure that meaningful consultation with members of the local community formed a central tenet of the final plan, and this objective has been met.

The views and opinions of a cross-section of the community of Blessington were collected over the course of the process, through both the surveys and the in-person consultation event. The remarkable response to the surveys provided the project team with a valuable baseline of data on how the town is experienced and perceived by the people who live, work and do business in Blessington on a daily basis, and these viewpoints have been reflected in the completed plan.

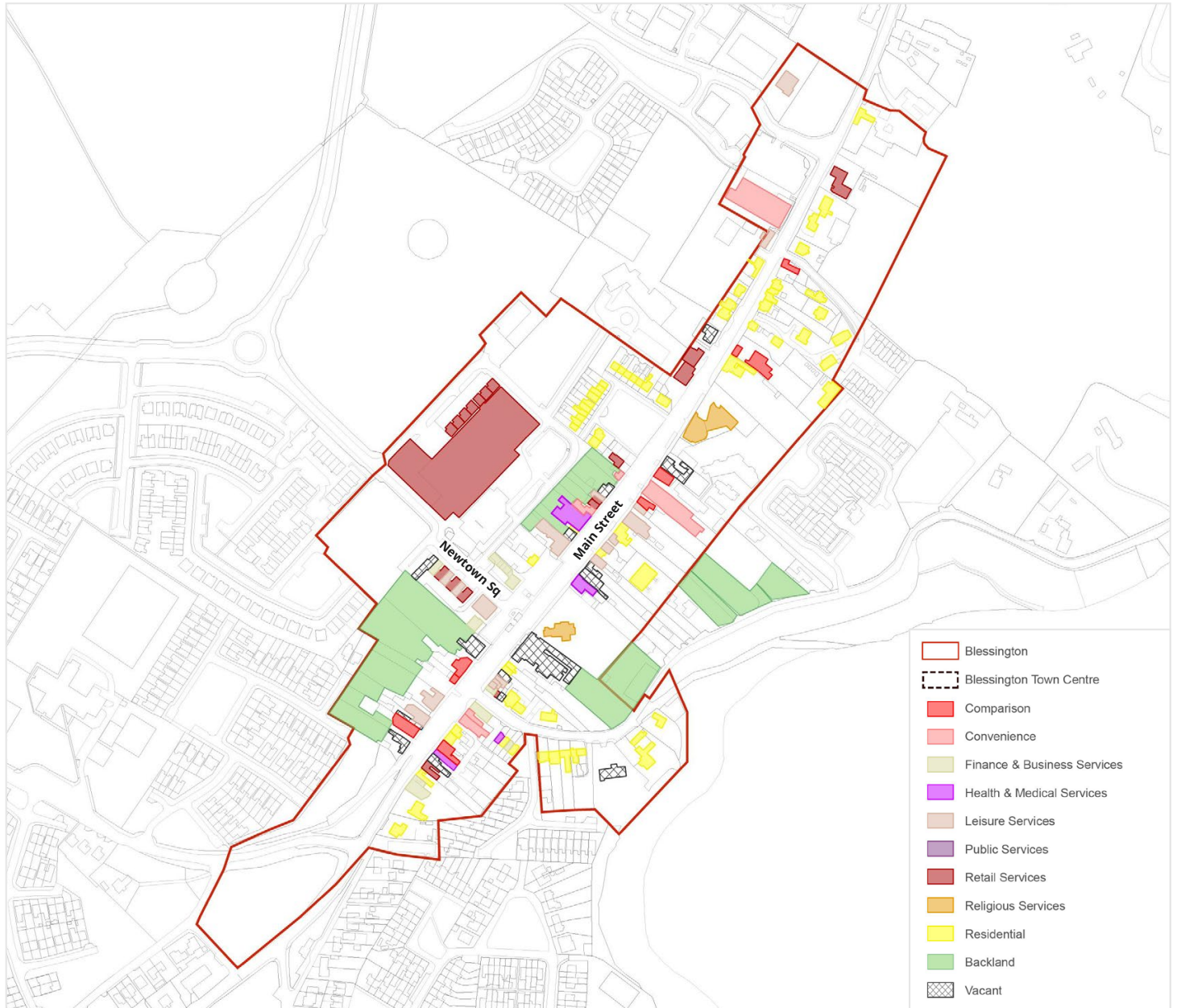
Similarly, the feedback generated at the Public Consultation event provided further insight into the lived experience of the people of Blessington and allowed members of the local community a chance to have their say on what the primary goals and objectives of the TCF Plan should be.

The public consultation process, reinforced by other research documents such as the updated Land Use Survey and the CTCHC, has ensured that the projects being put forward in the final TCF Plan represent an accurate, up-to-date and thorough account of the needs and wishes of the local community of Blessington, in line with the stated aims of the TCF policy approach.



Public consultation event

Landuse Survey



Land Use Plan

There a variety of vacant residential and commercial buildings within the Town Centre, these include:

- **Main St** - 8 commercial units & 4 residential units.
- **Kilbridge Rd** - 2 commercial units.
- **Blessington Shopping Centre/Dunnes Centre** - 1 commercial unit.

There are a series of underutilised back land spaces within the town centre and along Main Street. These have great development potential.

There has been small amounts of change in vacancy since the land use survey undertaken as part of the 2020 CTCHC. The former Ulster Bank has become vacant during this time, due to their withdrawal from the Irish market.

Comparison - Comparison goods stores sell non perishable goods such as furniture, carpets, televisions, etc.

Convenience - Convenience goods stores sell items such as sweets, prescriptions, groceries, etc.

Leisure - Leisure services are a range of businesses supplying entertainment such as pubs, cinemas, theatre, etc.

Public - Public services include community centres, council offices, libraries, etc.

Retail - Retail services provide specialised tasks including dry cleaning, hairdressers, travel agents, etc.

Transport and Pedestrian Facilities

Road Network

The N81 forms Main Street in the Township of Blessington. The current posted speed limit is currently 50km/hr through the town, and, with the exception of the controlled pedestrian crossings, there is lack of traffic calming devices and measures through the town.

The horizontal alignment through the town is relatively straight and there is potential for vehicles to be travelling in excess of the posted speed limit.

Data from 2019 (along the N81 south-west of the town) indicates that the Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) through the town is 14,600 (measured at the Kilbride Road Junction), with the peak day being a weekday and the peak hour being in the morning between 7 & 8am and an evening peak between 5 & 6pm. This is a considerable amount of traffic and likely creates conflicts with pedestrian movements.

There is an on-going local project to provide an inner relief road known as the Blessington Inner Relief Road (BIRR). This project aims to alleviate some pressure on the N81 through the town and encourage an uptake of vehicles utilising the new Local Road.

The main street of Blessington has a good-sized corridor between building lines which is uncommon for many towns in Ireland, where street corridors are usually quite constrained by existing building lines.

A plan for a Blessington Bypass has been suspended indefinitely that included the upgrade of the N81 from Hollywood Cross to Tallaght.



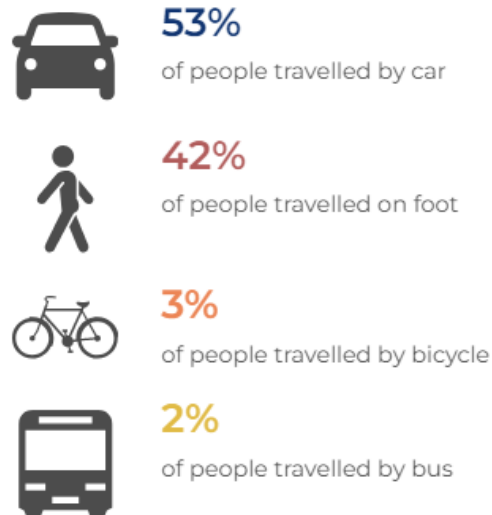
Transport Plan

Mode of Transport

From the data extracted from the most recent survey on modes of transport around Blessington, travel by car is the most popular and walking is not too far behind. Cycling is very low but still slightly ahead of bus transportation.

Blessington's Town Centre is quite compact and walkable, with short distances to desired locations. There is an opportunity to establish more direct routes to the town centre from surrounding residential estates.

As part of the survey consultation on the TCF Plan, residents were asked for information their primary mode of transport:



Statistics taken from survey data, 2023 (158 surveys)

Walkability

There are two controlled pedestrian crossings within the town centre area which are push button traffic light controlled crossings. There is another uncontrolled crossing close to St. Mary's Junior School.

Given the traffic volume on the N81, it can be difficult to cross with informal opportunities arising as a result of the push button crossing being operated. There is an opportunity to consider the implementation of another crossing within the town area in line with desire lines.

The town of Blessington is compact and walkable in terms of distance. A walkability audit was carried out as part of the CTCHC.

There are footpath linkages to the town centre from surrounding housing estates, however, there is an opportunity to provide greater pedestrian permeability from the housing estates linking to the town centre and providing better more direct walking routes.

Cycling Facilities

There is a lack of designated cycling facilities throughout the town area of Blessington. At present, cyclists mix with vehicular traffic. Given the favourable corridor width of the N81, there is potential to retrofit cycle lanes in the town centre area.

There is also a lack of bicycle parking facilities throughout the town centre area. The BIRR project includes designated cycle lanes in its design which will also promote active travel.

There is an opportunity to incorporate cycling infrastructure into the town by means of installing additional bicycle parking facilities and to install cycle lanes along the N81 through the town. Guidance suggests that cycle lanes, be located adjacent footpaths, however, some further consideration should be given to locating the cycle lanes adjacent to perpendicular parking.

Public Transport

In terms of public transport, Blessington is served by public bus services which consist of:

- 65 Route – operated by Dublin Bus (Connecting Dublin and Ballyknockan / Ballymore Eustace and serving Tallaght, Blessington, and other places on route) operating with 16 services towards Poolberg Street and 15 services towards Blessington on weekdays, 12 services each way on Saturdays and 10 services each way on Sundays.
- 884 Route – operated by TFI Local Link (Carlow and Sallins and serving Baltinglass, Blessington, Naas, and other places on route). Operating with 4 services each way on weekdays, 4 services each way on Saturdays and 3 services each way on Sundays
- 132 Route – operated by Bus Éireann (Connecting Bunclody & Dublin and serving Tullow, Baltinglass, Blessington and other places on route). Operating with 5 services each way on weekdays.
- 183 Route - operated by TFI Local Link (Connecting Sallins and Arklow and serving Naas, Blessington, Wicklow, Avoca, and other places on route). Operating with 4 services each way daily.

The closest train station is located in Naas.



Above: Walkability Plan



Example of bicycle storage in Newtown Square



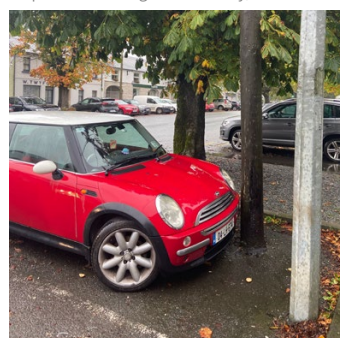
Example of sheltered cycle storage on Main Street



Map of the Blessington Greenway, Main Street



Blessington bus route, Main Street



Parking on Main Street



Electric car charging point, Main Street Car Park

Parking

Parking orientation in the town centre of Blessington is primarily perpendicular to the road carriageway, which maximises on street parking. Perpendicular parking is generally better suited in low-speed environments as set out in DMURs. For Blessington, as the town is situated along the N81, the implementation of traffic calming devices should be explored to reduce vehicular speeds.

A report from 2019 identified that there have been a number of collisions as a result of the perpendicular parking. Recommendations to reconfigure the layout to angled parking are suggested.

In addition to the on-street parking, off street carparks are located at:

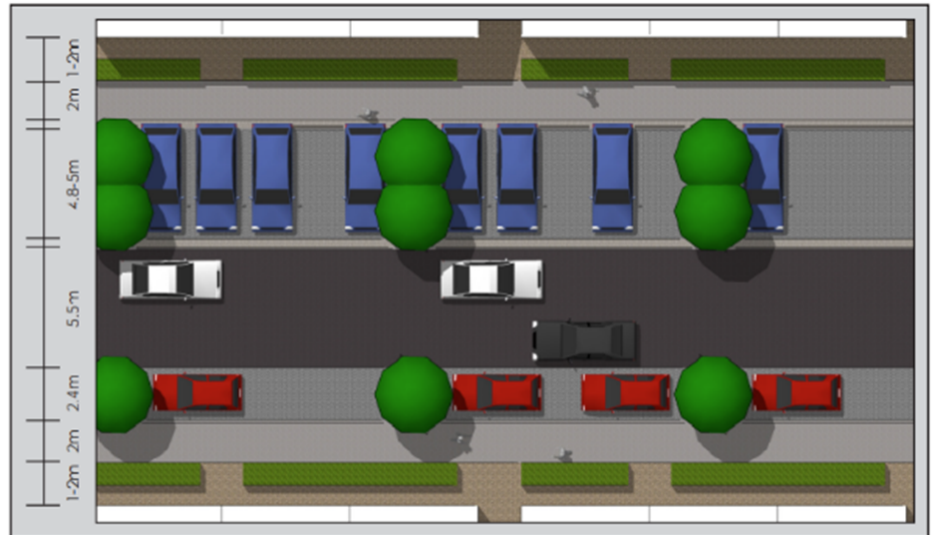
- Newtown Square
- The Church of Our Lady
- SuperValu
- St. Kevin's Community Centre (appears gated, possibly private)
- Aldi.

It is noted that there is a multi-storey car park to the rear of the Town Centre development, however, the top two floors of the car park are closed off.

As set out in Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS), to reduce the visual impact of parking parking spaces should generally be limited to three parallel spaces (including loading areas) and six perpendicular spaces.

Perpendicular parking should be restricted to one side of the street to provide a sense of enclosure and ensure that parking does not dominate the streetscape. By restricting perpendicular parking to one side of the street, options open up for any additional space to be occupied by cycle lanes, outdoor areas for businesses such as seating and better street furniture.

Given Blessington's geographical location, it is highly likely that long term storage of vehicles is occurring for the purposes of carpooling. This is to reduce congestion on the town centre and promote greener forms of transport.



Excerpt from DMURS in respect of parking patterns

A parking survey carried out in 2019 (Barry Transport Feasibility Report) highlighted that parking across Blessington was recorded for longer than a 3 hour stay.

Furthermore, it notes that there was a peak saturation of 82% for parking and Blessington has not experienced more demand for parking than parking spaces available.

It is understood that that there is no parking enforcement on the main street of Blessington. Parking enforcement should be considered as a method to regulate parking. This would be beneficial to businesses and the town centre, as parking spaces would likely become more available as well as discouraging long term parking and promoting active travel.

Spatial Development of the Town

Historic maps provide a clear understanding of how Blessington has grown over the years, and highlight both historic movement patterns and the presence of historic fabric and form that tells the story of the town.

The town centre study area is highlighted on the plan by a red line boundary.



Blessington circa. 1830s

Blessington was established in 1667 by Michael Boyle and has been developed in a linear form along the N81 (also known as Main Street) which runs generally north to south. This is the main transport route through the town. Old Ballymore Road is the secondary route through the town.

Blessington's Market Square sits at the centre of the town surrounded by the Downshire hotel and Monument and the old Market House (now Credit Union building) which was constructed between 1820 - 1840.

Blessington town is situated next to the Blessington Lake (also known as Poulaphouca Reservoir), which is a designated Natural Heritage Area and surrounding natural beauty.

In 1888, the steam tramway service began travelling from Terenure to Blessington.



Above: Blessington Town Centre, early to mid 1900s



Above: Blessington Town Centre, current day

During this time, Blessington has experienced new growth including the addition of the R410 (the Blessington Road) and other tertiary routes which start to form a local street network.

In 1982, the Church of our Lady was established. The bell tower was added in 2014.

The development along Main Street has continued to evolve as the commercial and retail core.

In 1932, the steam tramway service ended and was replaced with the Dublin bus route 65. As there is no train station, the bus continues to be the main transport service for Blessington.

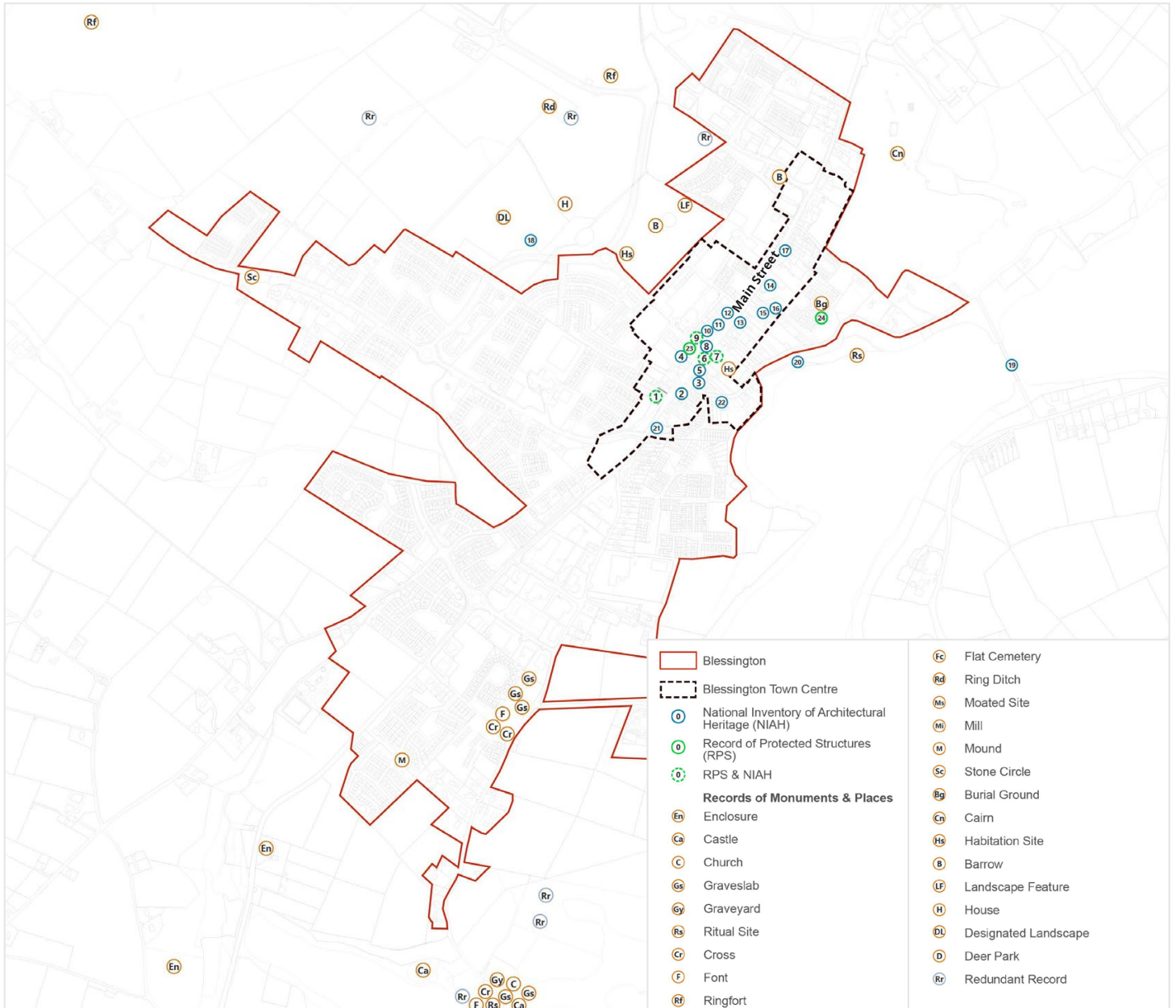
Development has increased significantly to the present day, with predominantly residential areas expanding the town in the west, northwest and southwest. Additionally there has been large retail developments with the Dunnes store, Aldi and Kenny's SuperValu.

Bus transport is still the primary public transport method in Blessington. The closest train station is in Naas (15 km distance).

With the proximity to Dublin, Blessington has been identified as a popular commuter town with residents wanting to settle down or getting priced outside of Dublin. This has increased Blessington's population and will continue to do so.

Blessington's market square and main street are dominated with parking however, heritage is still showcased within the area.

Heritage Assets



History

Blessington ('Baile Coimín' meaning 'town of Comyn', from the Irish surname *Ó Coimín*) is a town in County Wicklow with a population of 5,611 (2022 census). Blessington is situated approximately 27 km from Dublin and is located within a largely rural area.

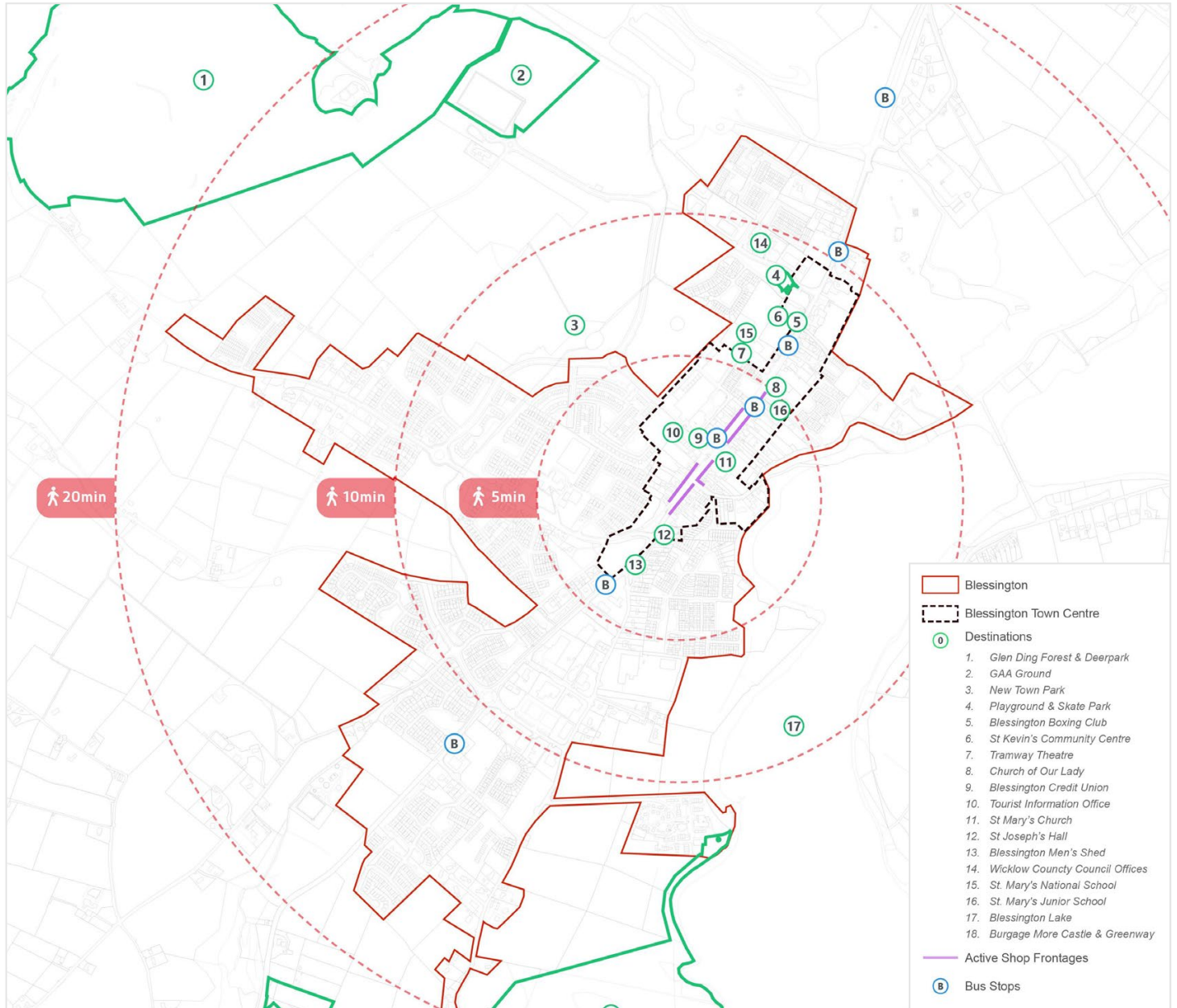
Michael Boyle (Archbishop of Dublin and Lord Chancellor of Ireland) founded Blessington in the late 17th century building prominent structures such as St Mary's Church and the Downshire House. In 1798, the Downshire House was burned during the rebellion against British rule in Ireland.

Heritage assets

Designated buildings within the town include:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 - T. Dempsey (RPS & NIAH) 2 - Horseshoe Gateway - Main Street 3 - The Old School House 4 - House Reg. No. 16303002 5 - House Reg No. 16303014 6 - The Downshire Hotel (RPS & NIAH) 7 - Saint Mary's Church (RPS & NIAH) 8 - Monument Reg No. 16303004 9 - Blessington Market House (RPS & NIAH) 10 - House Reg. No. 16303005 11 - W. Twyford House 12 - House Reg. No. 16303009 13 - House Reg. No. 16303012 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 - Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Most Holy Sacrament 15 - Blessington National School. Reg. No. 16303021 16 - Blessington National School. Reg. No. 16303022 17 - The Toll House 18 - Downshire House Ruins 19 - Blessington Bridge 20 - St Patrick's Well 21 - Saint Joesph's Hall 22 - Worker's House 23 - Former Ulster Bank . Downshire Lodge 24 - The Rectory (RPS.) |
|--|--|

Amenities and Destinations



Amenities and destination plan

Blessington is a relatively compact and walkable town, with most areas lying within a 20 minute walk to the centre of the town. There are several destinations of interest within a 15 minute walk from the town centre including:

- Two churches - St Mary's Church and Church of our Lady.
- Two schools - St. Mary's National School and St. Mary's Junior School.
- Public amenity destinations such as the Credit Union, Blessington Library, St Kevin's Community Centre, St. Joseph's Hall, the Men's Shed, and the Tramway theatre.

- Sports and recreation facilities comprising the GAA Ground, Blessington Boxing Club & other private gym spaces.
- Key green spaces and trails include the Blessington Play Area & Skate Park, Glen Ding Forest and Deerpark, Blessington Lake and the proposed new Town Park.
- Wicklow County Council offices and a Tourist Information office.

Blessington is surrounded by natural beauty and cultural destinations such as the Blessington Greenway, Blessington Lakes, June Blake's contemporary garden and Russborough House, 3.5km south of the town.

The night-time economy is primarily made up of a small number of pubs, restaurants and fast food takeaways. These are primarily located along Main Street and Newtown Square. There is a dining location at The Avon which is a three minute drive or 21 minute walk from Main Street.

There are three cafes along Main Street and one located within the new Town Centre development. Some of these provide outdoor seating.



Blessington Play Area & Skate Park



Provision within the Town Centre development



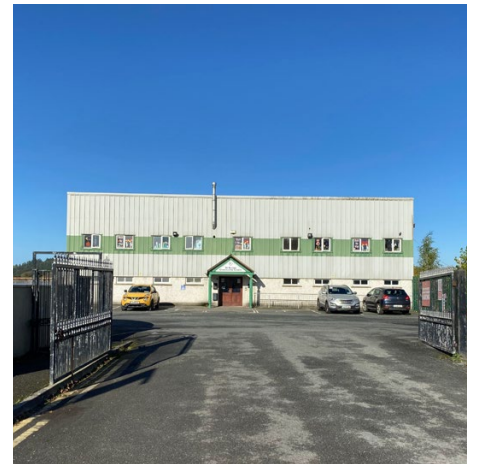
Coffee shop along Main Street, with vibrant branding making a positive contribution to the streetscape



St. Patrick's Well, a local heritage asset



The head of the existing Blessington Greenway at the Avon



St. Kevin's Community Centre, Main Street



Dunnes Stores, an important local amenity



St Mary's Church, a key landmark and heritage asset



Credit Union House (former Market House)

Socio-Economic context

Blessington is a small town covering 1.753km² in the county of Wicklow.

Its socio-economic characteristics include:

Population

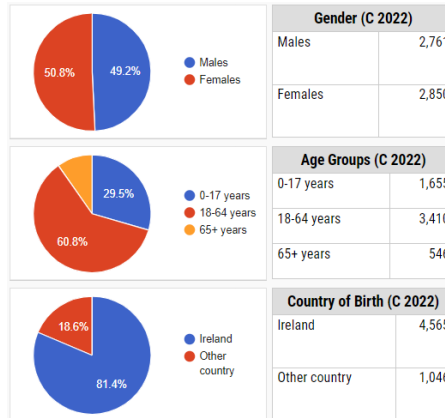
- In 2022, Blessington had a population of 5,611 (the 5th most populated town in Wicklow).
- In 2016, the population was 5,520, increasing by 0.28% since 2016 census. The county average is a 1.5%.
- Population density is relatively high with 3,200 people living in a km² area.

Population breakdown

- Blessington's population is evenly split with 2,850 females compared to 2,761 males. This is in line with both the national and county trends.
- 60.8% of the town's population fall in the 18-64 age bracket. This is in line with the county's average age of 39.1 years. In 2016, the average age within the county was 37.2 years.
- 9.7% of the Blessington's population is 65 or over, with 29.7% being 17 or under.
- 7% of the population are separated or divorced.
- In 2016, 62.9% of private households in Blessington were composed of couples, 22.6% were composed of four persons.
- 10.4% of Blessington's population are living with a disability. The total for Wicklow County is 13.5% (one in eight people).

Nationality

- Blessington has the highest proportion of persons with a nationality other than Irish at 13.6%. This percentage consists of predominately Poles and Lithuanians. The County Wicklow average is 9.2%, the lowest county with persons of a nationality other than Irish. Polish, French and Spanish are the most widely spoken foreign languages in Wicklow.
- The amount of people within the county that can speak Irish has increased since 2011 but still continue to lag behind the national average.



Blessington population make-up. Source: Central Statistics Office (cso.ie)

Employment and Industries

In 2016, Blessington had a total of 2,412 people 'at work' (61.5% of the population). By 2022, this number decreased to 2,406. 9.6% were unemployed, 10.7% were students and 9.6% were not working.

1,212 of Blessington's population travel to Dublin and the suburbs for work. 84% of commutes into Dublin are travelled by car.

In 2016, the commerce and trade sector was the largest employer, 661 people (27.4% of the total workforce). Professional services is the second largest employer (21.7%).

Blessington provides retail service to a wide rural catchment. There are a series of convenience shops including Dunnes Stores, Kenny's SuperValu and Aldi. Comparison stores are offered across main street and the Dunnes Store box retail unit.

In 2016, commercial vacant dwellings in Blessington were at 4%, the county average is 12.2% and the national average is 13.2%.

45% of all businesses are based in the town centre. 81% are independent and 9% are start-ups.

Education

There are 5 primary schools within Blessington and one community college for adults and further education.

The Blessington further Education and Training Centre offers education and life-long learning for those who have left school.

Housing

In 2016, residential vacancy sits at 6.3% which is far below the national average of 12.3%. Within Blessington owner occupied housing has remained at the same at 68% between 2016 and 2022. The private rental sector has increased from 20% in 2016 to 27% in 2022.

Cultural and Community Activities

Blessington Lake is a significant natural asset for the town. However, due to safety concerns swimming and other recreational assets are limited.

The Avon is host to an outdoor recreation and adventure centre which is a private, paid facility. However, the greenway walking route starts here and follows the perimeter of the lake through woodlands to Russborough House.

The Blessington GAA Club has four playing pitches (one which contains flood lighting to allow play in darker conditions) and a clubhouse on site.

Next to the Aldi on Oak Drive, there is a public playground, outdoor fitness area and skatepark.

Overall, Blessington is lacking well serviced and landscaped publicly accessible, open and recreational spaces.

There is a public library located in the new Town Centre Development.

The Blessington Primary Care centre is located in the Blessington Business Park, reducing the need to travel to larger cities for treatment.

Tourism

The Blessington Tourism Office is located in the Newtown Square and provides information on destinations and activities in the area.

Town Centre Experience



Town centre experience plan

The town centre experience is greatly influenced by the presence of parked cars and the volume of traffic along the N81. There is an imbalance of space afforded to pedestrians and cyclists and this impedes movement and impacts on the quality of the town centre experience.

Pedestrian crossing points across Main Street are few, and narrow in width. In the vicinity of Newtown Square, cars are evidenced to park across crossings preventing pedestrian movement.

Footpath widths are generally good in the town but pinch points exist, and the overhang of cars can eat into this space.

Public realm areas fronting onto the Credit Union, and adjacent the Dunnes Town Centre development provide spaces for gathering which add to the town centre experience.

Active frontages are primarily situated along Main Street and Newtown Square. The quality of the historic built form is generally good, with newer development tending to detract from the character of the town.

There is minimal spill-out spaces for businesses along Main Street. This is limited to ground floor retail units within the Town Centre development which allows for a generous sheltered walkway.

Breaks in development between the historic town centre and the new Town Centre development accentuate the feeling of 'old' and 'new' and the lack of integration between the two.

Greening within the town centre is minimal and provided by mature but intermittent street trees along Main Street and more recent planting along Newtown Square. Where street trees are more common, they enhance the character immeasurably. The presence of overhead electrical wires is impacting the growth of trees along Main Street, with large species being pruned heavily on an annual basis. This impacts their future potential.

Town Centre Experience



Parking along Main Street impacts negatively on the pedestrian experience



Narrow pedestrian crossing along Main Street



Overhead electrical cabling is a constraint to retention of existing street trees and planning for more.



Generally wide stretches of footpath with examples of attractive shop fronts enriching the historic character of the town.

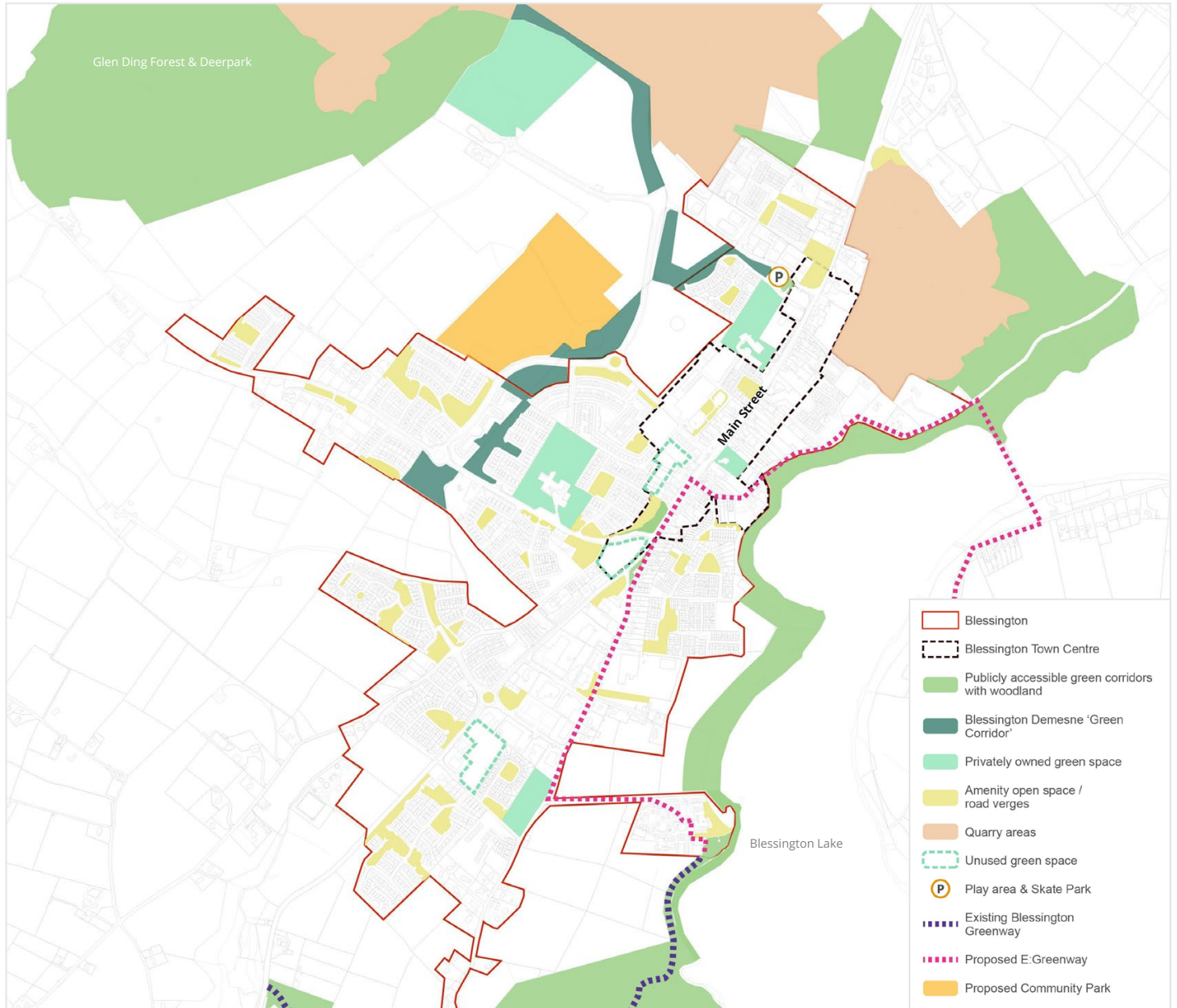


Newer development in the town feels out of sync with the town centre core, in terms of scale and massing, roofline design, and condition.



Break in development between historic town centre (background) and new Town Centre development limits integration

Town Centre Open Space



Town centre open space plan

Blessington has a good amount of strategic scale recreational green space within the wider area, such as Glen Ding Forest & Deerpark, Blessington Lake and the existing Blessington Greenway.

There are existing corridors of green open space to the east of the town where woodland is a key characteristic. However, areas within this corridor could be improved with better connections to amenities.

The Blessington Demesne 'Green Corridor' to the west of the town centre affords longevity to existing habitat and water features. The new town park (in construction) will enhance

this corridor to provide a strategic scale recreational amenity for the community.

Within the town generally, amenity green space is provided as part of residential development. However, this is generally internal to the development, lacks variety (mown grass, street trees) without through connections.

There are recreational green spaces where permission is required to access such as school grounds and the GAA pitches.

Town centre green space comprises:

- Street trees, although the quantum and spread is inconsistent and trees are generally absent from the southern section of Main Street.
- Green open space at St. Joseph's, which is a residential green space which fronts onto Main Street.
- Blessington Play Area & Skate Park.
- Green open space between two areas of car parking adjacent to the new Town Centre development.

Summary SCOT analysis

Strengths

- Established and proactive Town Team
- Landscape setting as the gateway to the Wicklow Mountains National Park with features of significance such as Blessington Lake
- Historic development of the town as a landlord town
- Blessington ACA covering the town centre core and comprising a plethora of RPS and NIAH built assets
- Attractive streetscape, with placemaking features such as monuments, gate piers and horseshoe gateways
- Proximity to biodiversity assets - Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA of national importance due to population of Greylag Goose
- Walking experiences afforded by nearby Glen Ding Forest and Deerpark and Blessington greenway at the Avon
- Key town generators: Supervalu, Aldi and Dunnes providing retail services for a wide catchment
- A high volume of independent businesses
- Lower than average vacancy rate within the town centre
- Good amenity: five schools, public library, GAA ground and various sports clubs
- Generous and free parking provision, with perpendicular parking maximising the amount of on-street parking
- New town park in construction to the north west of the town
- Future plans for extending the existing Greenway to comprise an E:Greenway with a circular walking and cycling route around the Lake
- The road corridor through the town centre (N81) through the town is wide which will be beneficial in retrofitting cycle lanes and improving footpath widths.
- The town is relatively compact and walkable
- The BIRR project is progressing which should see some reduction in traffic volumes travelling along the N81 through the town centre.

Challenges

- Visual prominence of cars along key streets in the town, particularly Main Street which experiences congestion and intensity of parked cars
- Traffic conflicts with the existing perpendicular parking
- The dominant view of business owners that there is a lack of available parking
- Creating a pedestrian and cycling friendly environment on a national road with high traffic counts
- Visual prominence of vacant buildings and sites between the historic core and more recent Town Centre development
- Lack of integration between old and new Blessington
- Encouraging new uses and adaptations of older properties whilst maintaining the intrinsic character
- Physical connection between the town centre and the Lake is weak
- Physical connections between residential developments and the town centre is weak
- Limited variety within the hospitality sector, for example, a small number of restaurants, no hotels in the town
- No coherent approach to design, quality or pattern of development
- Presence of overhead electrical wires presents challenges to street trees
- The quality of more recent public realm enhancements and development can be poor, with paving around tree pits forming a trip hazard.

Opportunities

- The E:Greenway will attract an estimated 300,000 visitors to Blessington which will increase footfall
- Create a pedestrian and cycling priority environment within the town centre to generate activity and vibrancy, and ensure footfall from the Greenway into the town
- Introducing greater permeability through the town centre for walking and cycling
- Embrace placemaking and the creation of high quality public realm spaces which add value to the town
- Reduce the prominence of parking by re-orientating bays and introducing green infrastructure

- Implement parking enforcement via time-limited parking signs in addition to enforcement
- Enhancement of town centre green spaces for the benefit of the climate, biodiversity and amenity
- Increasing the quantum and variety of street trees
- Improve cycling provision, such as designated cycle lanes and storage
- Renewal of key built assets such as the former Ulster Bank and Downshire Hotel will act as catalyst for further regeneration
- Vacant sites within the town centre core have the potential to unify the historic core and the more recent Town Centre development
- Opening up access to backland areas to the north west of Main Street with unlock future potential for sustainable growth and town centre living
- Plots to the south east of Main Street, between the town centre and the Lake have deep plots, with development potential
- Diversifying the retail experience with independent shops and destinations with community value such as a Leisure Centre.

Threats

- Condition of important landmarks will decline without investment
- Residential sprawl made up of commuters who do not contribute to daytime economy
- Weakening of character of town centre through infill development out of sync with the historic vernacular
- Existing street trees at risk of decline due to excessive pruning as a result of overhead wires.
- Modifications of the carriageway of the N81 will require the approval of TII.
- Local businesses and persons may not be in favour of the removal of some on street parking.
- The BIRR project may take some time to compete the consent and constriction process which would impact the development of ideas along the National road.

Part Two

A landscape photograph of a lake with a white wavy line across it. The background shows a forested hillside under a cloudy sky. The foreground is dominated by tall grasses and reeds. The text 'Part Two' is overlaid in white, bold font on the left side of the image.

1 Introduction

Action Plan

The Action Plan sets out the long term vision for development within Blessington, presented through a variety of strategic and site specific opportunities.

The Blessington Town Centre First (TCF) Plan is a visioning document to be utilised by Wicklow County Council (WCC), the Blessington Town Team, local landowners and developers, business owners and community groups to blueprint the town's development.

The proposed opportunities within the Action Plan have been developed in response to the findings of the Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC) and through extensive consultation with the local community driving the decision making process.

Approach

The Action Plan outlines:

- The overarching vision and objectives for Blessington
- The opportunity development process from consultation, long list to a short list of preferred opportunities
- Provides outline descriptions, precedents and delivery mechanisms for the proposed short list
- A delivery plan to highlight which opportunities can be delivered in the short term and which may be long term aspirations.

The Action Plan will provide the relevant information and next steps for Blessington to achieve its collective goal.

Structure of the Action Plan

The Action Plan is structured as follows:

1. The Vision for Blessington
2. The Objectives for Blessington
3. Defining the Project Long List
4. Developing the Short List
5. The TCF Projects
6. Delivery Plan.



Blessington Study Area

2 Defining the Place

The Vision for Blessington

The Action Plan sets out the vision and objectives for the TCF Plan.

The TCF Plan has developed and enhanced the initial vision for Blessington, and taken forward the key 'health indicators' which were identified during the CTCHC process.

The key 'health indicators' include:

1. Accessibility
2. Urban Realm
3. Community
4. Natural Environment
5. Economy.

Information from business and community surveys and in-person stakeholder engagement has been captured to update the vision for the town.

A set of key objectives have been generated in response to consultation feedback, and these relate to the established 'health indicators.' These form both the framework and benchmark for all identified opportunities.

BLESSINGTON



The Town Centre First Vision celebrates Blessington as a welcoming and walkable town steeped in history and located a stone's throw from Blessington Lake and the Wicklow Mountains.

Blessington will maximise opportunities to reinforce positive placemaking through creating active, well-designed and high quality spaces which accentuate the town centre environment and reinforce the historic development of the town.

It is a 'self-sustaining town' working hard to meet the needs of its growing residential community. It will maximise opportunities which build on and diversify the existing offer - strengthening footfall and dwell time and ensuring economic resilience.

Tourism from the planned E-Greenway is a unique opportunity for the town centre. Enhancing the existing character and sense of place through streetscape improvements which prioritise walkers and wheelers will make the town 'Greenway ready'.

The town will support active, sociable lifestyles ensuring improved health and well-being for all ages and generations. Climate action will be a priority consideration for all development in Blessington.

The Objectives for Blessington



Accessibility

Making significant improvements to mobility and connectivity is vital to the future of Blessington. Mitigating the impact of commuter traffic along Main Street and planning for a town centre environment which prioritises connectivity for walkers and wheelers are fundamental drivers of the TCF Plan.



Urban Realm

Enhancement of prominent streets and the central square will significantly contribute to improving the look and feel of the town and the built form. This will generate greater footfall, animation and dwell time, supporting sense of place, the local economy and community cohesion.



Community

Due to the projected growth of Blessington and the tourism potential associated with the E:Greenway, it is vital that the TCF Plan brings benefits which support a growing population and provide for greater amenity in relation to health and well-being, play, socialising and inter-generational activity.



Economy

The activation of prominent vacant town centre sites is a key objective. Retention of historic built form should be prioritised, evaluating opportunities for enhancement, repurposing and better integration. Increasing diversity within the retail provision, and enabling functions which would contribute to the evening economy.



Natural Environment

Blessington is blessed with abundant natural assets. Strengthening the network of green space with the town centre environment and connecting routes which provides access to local features will contribute to placemaking, bring benefits to the community and tourists alike whilst offering greater resilience to climate change and flood risk.

Defining the Project Long List

A long list of opportunities has been developed as part of and across two phases on a Collaborative Town Centre Health Check (CTCHC). These opportunities summarise and reflect on the key findings from the CTCHC process.

The proposed long list of opportunities has been prioritised via workshop reviews with the Town Team, and in response to feedback received through surveys and public consultation.

The final long list of opportunities as shown in **Table 1**.

<p>Comprehensive traffic strategy <i>Review existing traffic, road and parking requirements within the town to provide an evidence base for future projects</i></p>	<p>Main Street Public Realm Improvements <i>Proposals to improve the pedestrian accessibility and public realm quality of Main Street</i></p>	<p>Utilise Vacant Land and Building <i>Reusing the vacant properties and areas of land within the town as new accommodation, retail, green spaces, etc</i></p>	<p>Leisure Centre <i>Develop a town centre leisure centre to provide various health and well-being activities for the community</i></p>
<p>Market Square <i>A strategy for the regeneration of the Square with a focus on retail and pedestrians</i></p>		<p>Town Wifi <i>Introduce a town WiFi network to help promote business and learning opportunities</i></p>	<p>Enhance heritage and sense of place <i>Utilise and build on the towns unique history and qualities to promote the 'story' of Blessington</i></p>
<p>Cycle Infrastructure <i>Propose and install new bicycle infrastructure to promote active travel within Blessington</i></p>	<p>Reduce Visual Clutter & Underground Cables <i>A strategy to reduce visual clutter within the town, including over head cable, poor quality signage, etc</i></p>	<p>My Town App <i>Develop a town app to map the town amenities, promote local history and encourage independent retail</i></p>	<p>Street Trees <i>Improve the quality and setting of existing street trees, whilst also introducing new street trees within the public realm</i></p>
<p>Parking Strategy <i>Review the existing parking numbers and propose updates to the existing layout and function</i></p>	<p>Town Design Statement <i>Prepare a Design Statement for Blessington that seeks to protect and enhance the positive characteristics of the town</i></p>	<p>MUGA <i>Multi-use games areas are facilities that can accommodate a range of sports, activities and ages</i></p>	<p>Promote Local Food & Craft <i>Build on the towns market heritage and local produce through markets and restaurants, to identify Blessington as a destination</i></p>
<p>E-Chargers for Cars <i>Develop electric charging facilities throughout Blessington for all vehicle types</i></p>	<p>Public Realm Enhancements <i>A strategy to improve the visual and material quality of the public realm, creating more pedestrian focused spaces</i></p>	<p>Park Network <i>Introduce new green spaces within Blessington at a variety of scales and improve active travel connections and routes between them</i></p>	<p>Encourage and Attract Independent Retail <i>Promote independent retailers and local products to have create a positive impact on the local economy</i></p>
<p>Enhance existing green spaces and biodiversity <i>An audit of the towns natural assets to understand what can be improved</i></p>	<p>Shop Front and Signage Strategy <i>A coordinated strategy to improve the quality and visual language of Blessington through branding and colour schemes</i></p>		<p>Promote Green Blessington <i>Develop a campaign that engages residents, businesses and schools to raise awareness of biodiversity and sustainability</i></p>
<p>New Accommodation Offers <i>Support and encourage new accommodation provision in and around the town</i></p>	<p>Develop a Drainage and Water Strategy <i>Develop a strategy to future proof Blessington against potential future climate events</i></p>	<p>Promote Evening Activities <i>Improve Blessington's night time economy through enhanced public realm, additional hospitality, etc</i></p>	<p>Temporary Use of Vacant Properties <i>Support the reuse of vacant premises as temporary retail or business hubs, allowing new startups to test ideas</i></p>

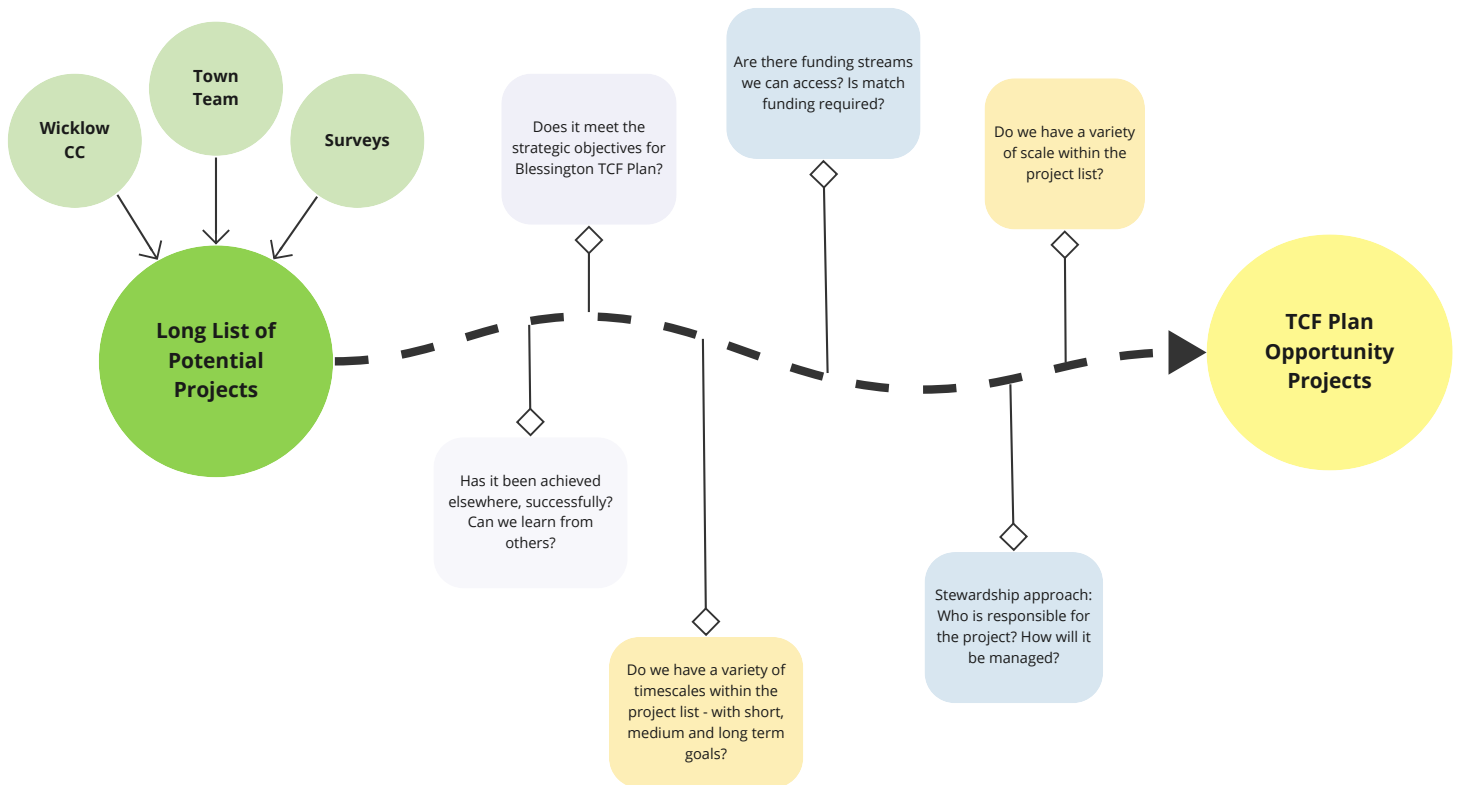
Table 1 Long list of Opportunities extracted from the Phase 2 CTCHC

Developing a Short List

Stakeholders were asked to prioritise the long list into a manageable shortlist of project opportunities.

During discussions with the Town Team and WCC, the long list was prioritised to define which opportunities the community wanted to take forward within the lifetime of the Plan.

The Plan does not prohibit the further development of long list opportunities should community, funding or market opportunities align.



Defining the Short List

The long list of opportunities has also been reviewed and co-ordinated into a Combined TCF Project. Some opportunities are cross cutting and may feature within one or more Combined Projects.

The Combined Projects do not prohibit any singular long list opportunities being taken forward on an individual basis, but rather help to achieve better funding and delivery mechanisms.

Long List Opportunities		Combined Project
Completion of Inner Relief Road		STRATEGIC TRANSPORT IMPROVEMENTS
Comprehensive Transport Strategy		
Cycle Infrastructure		
Parking Strategy		
E-chargers for Cars		

Long List Opportunities		Combined Project
Main Street Public Realm Improvements		URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK
Reduce Visual Clutter and Underground Cables		
Town Design Statement		
Public Realm Enhancements		
Develop Water and Drainage Strategy		

Long List Opportunities		Combined Project
Market Square Development		PLACEMAKING PROJECTS
Enhance Heritage and Sense of Place		
Reduce Visual Clutter & Underground Cables		
Shop Front Strategy & Signage Strategy		
Promote 'Green Blessington'		
Public Realm Enhancements		

Long List Opportunities		Combined Project
Utilise Vacant Land and Buildings in the Town Centre		ACTIVATING THE TOWN CENTRE
Market Square Development		
Public Realm Enhancements		

Defining the Short List

Long List Opportunities		Combined Project
Temporary Use of Vacant Properties		SUPPORTING COMMUNITY AMENITY
My Town App		
Leisure Centre		
Develop a Park Network		

Long List Opportunities		Combined Project
Enhance Existing Green Spaces and Biodiversity		TOWN CENTRE GREEN SPACE NETWORK
Develop a Park Network		
MUGA		
Street Trees		
Develop Drainage and Water Strategy		

Long List Opportunities		Combined Project
Temporary Use of Vacant Properties		SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS
Town WiFi		
Encourage and Attract Independent Retail		
Promoting Evening Activities		
Promote Local Food and Craft Markets		

Long List Opportunities		Combined Project
New Accommodation Offer		IMPROVING ACCOMODATION OFFER

3 Enabling the Place

The proposed short of list projects has been developed in response to the previous findings in the CTCHC and through consultation with the Town Team and local community.

The shortlisted projects set out the overarching aims and aspirations for each opportunity. Each of the projects has varied costs, timeframe, impacts and funding opportunities associated with their implementation. They are also made up of one major project or a series of projects which work together to achieve the overall goal.

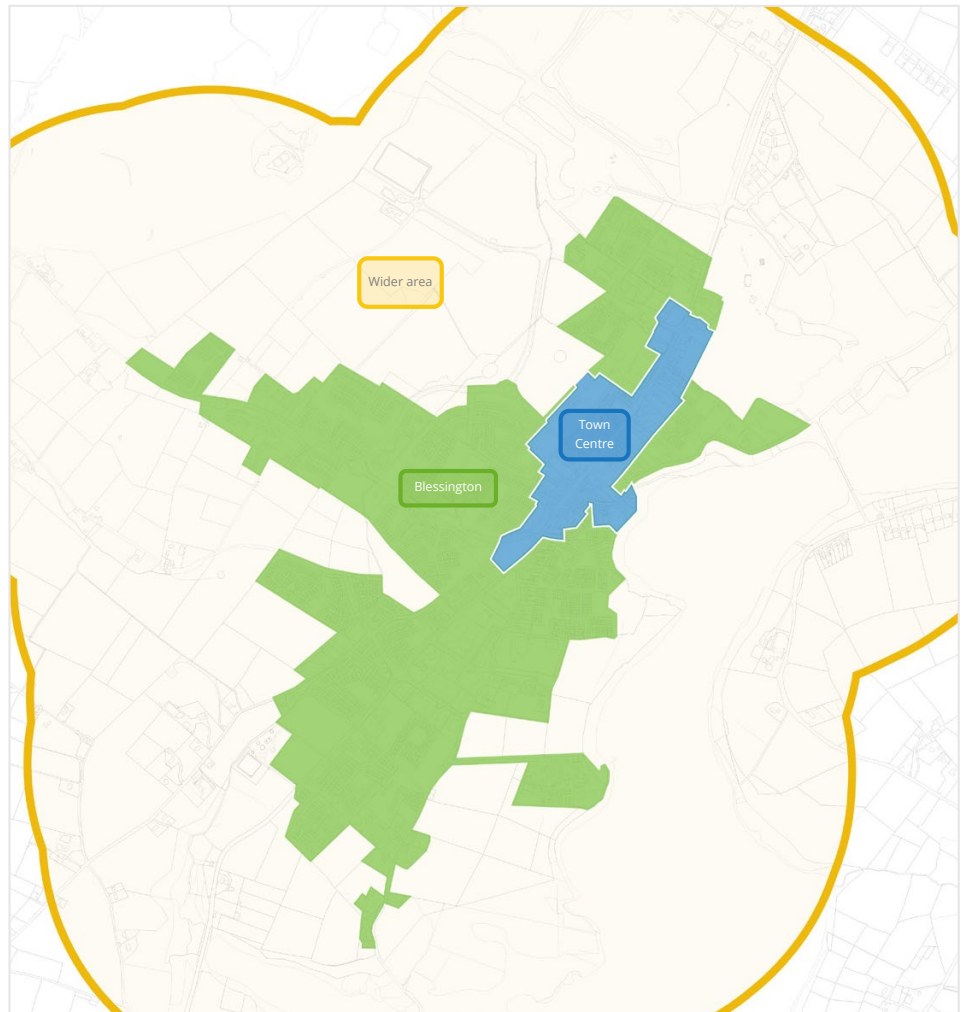
A high frequency of projects are focused around the Town Centre highlighted in *blue*, whilst there are also opportunities that would be implemented throughout Blessington as highlighted in *green*. The town centre will become the community and economic heart of Blessington, allowing it to thrive as a 'self-sustaining town'.

Proposed projects, such as the Town Centre Green Space Network, will also be connected to the wider area as shown in *yellow* through strategic links such as the greenway. Opportunities should help to connect Blessington to neighbouring towns and surrounding natural and historic assets. This will ensure that Blessington is a welcoming destination that also meets the needs of its residents.

The following pages will outline descriptions, precedents and delivery mechanisms for the proposed short list.

The Project Shortlist

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Strategic Transport Improvements | 5 Supporting Community Amenities |
| 2 Urban Design Framework | 6 Town Centre Green Space Network |
| 3 Placemaking Projects | 7 Supporting Local Business |
| 4 Improving Vacancy & Dereliction | 8 Improving Accommodation Offer |



Blessington Opportunities Plan

1 Strategic Transport Improvements

Project Overview & Objectives

Strategic Transport Improvements would critically outline the long term vision for the town and develop proposals to address key issues inline with national and local policy, best practice and technical standards. The findings could be incorporated into the scope of any public realm-focused RRDF project.

Objectives

This Project would achieve the following objectives of the Blessington TCF Plan:

Accessibility **Urban Realm** **Community** **Economy**

There are a number of key transport and connectivity issues within Blessington which need to be addressed. These comprise:

- The N81 (Main Street) experiences a high volume of traffic which creates a town centre character centred on the movement of vehicles.
- There are two controlled pedestrian crossings within the town but their locations do not align with desire lines.
- A prevalence of on-street car parking along Main Street and Newtown Square limiting pedestrian movement.
- A lack of available on-street car parking spaces due to cars parking for long durations.
- An existing private multi-storey car park which is operating at reduced capacity.
- A lack of traffic calming devices along the N81 to reduce vehicular speeds travelling through the town centre.
- A lack for street trees and vegetation within the town centre generally.
- A severe lack of cycle infrastructure which will create a disconnect between the town centre and the proposed E-Greenway.
- A lack of walking and cycling connectivity between Blessington Lakes and the town centre, and
- A lack of permeability between residential areas and the town centre to better support active modes of travel.

Collaboration and Communication

Consultation with the Town Team highlighted the primary importance of resolving the impact of existing traffic flows through Blessington. The completion of the IRR is considered to be the key infrastructure required to facilitate any change through Blessington Town Centre, in the absence of a re-routing of the N81.

The impact of congestion and issues with parking in the town is further reflected within survey data. Both local businesses and members of the community feel that congestion is the paramount issue in the town. The mis-management of parking is also a key issue for businesses, in that there is no control. Given the proximity to Dublin, it is likely that some long term parking is occurring for people carpooling and availing of public transports from Blessington's Main Street.

There were a number of potential projects identified through the CTCHC Phase 2. These include:

- Completion of Inner Relief Road
- Comprehensive Traffic Strategy
- Parking Strategy
- Introducing Cycle Infrastructure, and
- E-Vehicle Chargers.



The impact of on-street parking along both sides of Main Street and congestion from the National road compounds the effect of vehicles on the character of Blessington Town Centre.



The multi-storey car park within the Town Centre development is an existing but under-used resource within the town. Exploring the potential for reopening the upper floors would ease on-street congestion.

The creation of a Blessington Inner Relief Road (BIRR) has been identified as a key opportunity within the Blessington LAP, alongside a by-pass for the N81.

The BIRR is considered to have greater short to medium term potential, given that sections of the road are already in-situ, and the programme to complete remaining sections is progressing. The completion of the BIRR is required to truly reduce congestion on the N81.

Project Brief

Following on from our Part One analysis, the TCF Plan sets out below the recommended objectives for each mode of transport in the short, medium and long term.

A fundamental objective is to ensure Blessington is 'Greenway ready' and to shift the momentum in the town away from vehicles towards active travel. Due planning and coordination of this is as essential accompaniment to any public realm works.

Mode	Short Term (up to one year)	Medium Term (one to three years)	Long Term (three years+)
Pedestrian Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Street furniture and signage audit and rationalisation. Additional rest spots provided. Develop opportunities to encourage greater permeability to residential estates in proximity to the Town Centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional crossing point across N81 Main Street and Newtown Square, with the location to be agreed by field survey. Introduction of additional pedestrian routes to better connect Main Street and the new Town Centre Development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pedestrianisation of Market Square. Public realm improvements along N81 Main Street and Newtown Square. Enhancement of pedestrian permeability within backland areas, e.g. The Lanes.
Cycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New high quality cycle parking at key locations on N81 Main Street and Newtown Square Interim cycle lanes along N81 Main Street and Newtown Square. Develop opportunities to encourage greater permeability to residential estates in proximity to the Town Centre. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated segregated cycle facilities along N81 Main Street and Newtown Square. This would require reappportioning vehicle space to cycling.
Public Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish timetable information on flag stops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New bus stops including shelters at their current location and remove lay-bys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in bus frequency or locations depending on business case.
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review use of management systems for parking that prioritise spaces for residents, shoppers and mobility-focused parking. Review parking numbers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-allocate on street car parking to multi-storey facility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time or charge-based management of spaces, requiring parking enforcement via signage and traffic warden. Introduce additional electric vehicle charging points.
Vehicles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of the IRR. Review vehicle speeds and numbers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gateway features at the north and south on entry to the town centre on N81 Main Street to encourage use of IRR. Introduce traffic calming such as raised tables. Reduce speed limit to 30km/hr. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce HGV traffic through the town. Increase E-charging bays. Continue to support the upgrade of the N81 (Blessington Bypass).
Wayfinding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personalised Travel Planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Town Travel Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Town app to show sustainable transport methods, key routes and key destinations

Transport improvements should actively seek to mitigate the following risks:

- Modifications to the carriageway of the N81 will require the approval of Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII).
- The BIRR project may take some time to compete the consent and restriction process which would impact the development of ideas along the National road.
- Local businesses and people may not be in favour of the removal of some on-street parking.

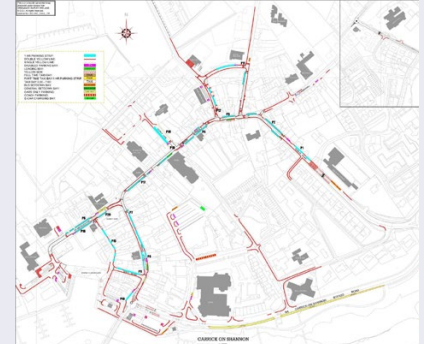
Carrick-on-Shannon Strategic Transport Assessment, Co Leitrim,
Leitrim County Council

Following completion of streetscape works in Carrick-on-Shannon in 2022, the local authority began a process of clarifying traffic regulations around parking in the county town.

The aim of the strategy was to ensure free parking in the town's car parks but apply charges to all other on-street parking to try and encourage longer dwell times and reduce congestion within the town centre.

In a statement, Leitrim County Council said:

"Paid on street parking is in place to ensure that short term parking is available for shoppers and visitors to the town centre and therefore maintain the centre of the town as a vibrant and inviting place for all visitors".



Layout of parking restrictions in Carrick-on-Shannon



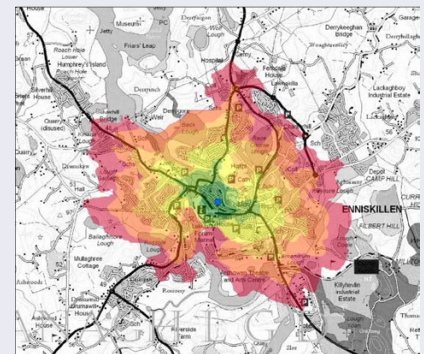
Streetscape improvements and traffic regulations as part of a hand in hand strategy in Carrick-on-Shannon

Parking Strategy and Action Plan,
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

A five-year Parking Strategy and Action Plan was developed to address the overall requirement for off-street car parking within the district. The strategy was developed following a review of existing parking practices and demand throughout the district following consultation with members of the public and key stakeholders.

The strategy aims to:

- Provide an appropriate level of parking to support economic vitality;
- Ensure that parking is inclusive of all types of users;
- Ensure that parking takes place in appropriate locations;
- Deliver well-managed, high quality parking utilising technology where possible;
- Ensure that car parking provision encourages sustainable commuter travel;
- Ensure that parking provision supports businesses and tourism, a reduction in congestion and pollution and improved road safety.



Enniskillen town walkability mapping



Enniskillen town streetscape improvements with on-street parking restrictions

COST	■ ■ ■ ■
TIMEFRAME	■ ■ ■ □
IMPACT	■ ■ ■ ■
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Government • DCRD RRDF • Town and Village Renewal Scheme
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Wicklow CC

2 Urban Design Framework

Project Overview & Objectives

Urban design is an approach to the design of buildings and the spaces between them that focuses on specific design processes and outcomes. It is an interdisciplinary field incorporating elements of architecture, engineering, landscape design.

It conveys a holistic approach at a strategic scale. It is the fabric of a town which makes a significant contribution to creating an appealing place, encouraging social interaction and reflecting a town's character.

An Urban Design Framework (UDF) is a strategic planning tool that sets out a design vision for the future development of a place. It enables consistency of development and guides developers, landowners and planners in a collective pursuit of high quality design.

Blessington Town Centre would benefit from an Urban Design Framework study as the town is seeing considerable growth driven by the demand for housing, yet the town centre core has pronounced areas of vacancy. In addition, more recent development within the town centre is of lower than expected quality, can lack character and is poorly maintained.

Recognising that most future development within the town is likely to be private developer funded, an UDF study advocated by the Wicklow's Forward Planning Team and Blessington's Town Regeneration Office would set the tone and provide a quality benchmark and consistency of style across the town centre.

Collaboration and Communication

There were a number of potential projects identified through the CTCHC Phase 2 which could be addressed by an Urban Design Framework study.

This includes:

- Main Street Public Realm Improvements
- Reduce Visual Clutter & Underground Cables
- Town Design Statement
- Develop Drainage and Water Strategy, and
- Public Realm Enhancements.

Public consultation has indicated that improvements to the public realm are greatly desired, including more bins and trees and improved maintenance of the footpaths.



Clutter within the streetscape along Main Street, demonstrating the visual impact of overhead lines. Drainage is located within retrofitted accessible parking bays. Footpath materials are inconsistent across the town.



Existing trees along Newtown Square showing signs of tree root egress which is lifting the paving within the canopy diameter of the tree. Some areas of paving have become a trip hazard as a result.



Development at Newtown Square is showing signs of wear, along with the block paved carriageway which is failing at key junctions due to stress by vehicles.

Project Brief

A UDF has the capacity to retain, restore and enhance character. It can also create uniformity, setting out what is working well and which areas require upgrade.

A UDF is recommended as a pre-cursor to any individual public realm enhancement project, in order to ensure a consistency of style across all future projects.

The following aspects are recommended for inclusion within the scope:

1. SCOT analysis and audit of the existing context relating to:
 - Built form: a study of scale, massing, plot and block sizes, active frontages, materials
 - Public realm: audit of different spaces and streets and their features (movement, utilities, signage, street furniture, materials, public art, trees)
 - Natural character: topography, landscape character
 - Historic townscape character: looking at the intrinsic qualities and features of the Architectural Conservation Area.
2. Development of guiding design principles aligned to each discipline area, setting clear guidance for the expectations of all future development.
3. Movement Plan
4. Landscape Strategy
5. Example applications of the guiding principles in the form of concept layouts.

Public realm study

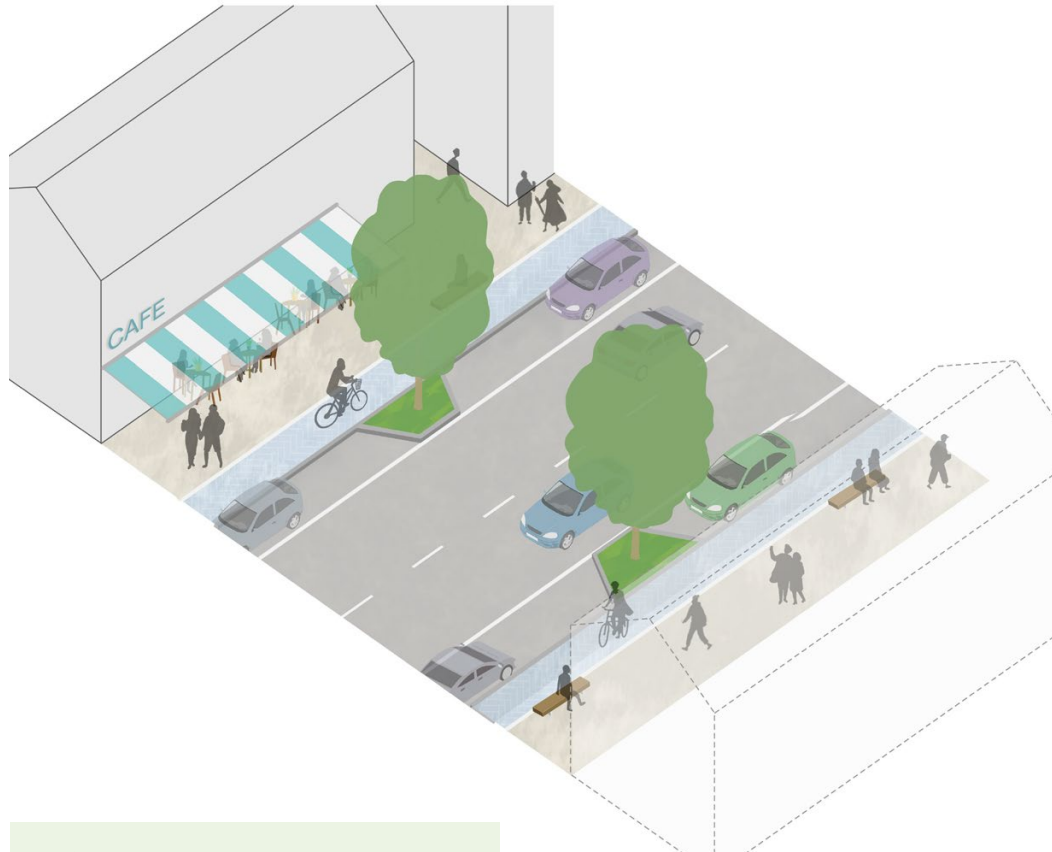
An example concept design output from the Public Realm element of an UDF is demonstrated in the following pages, in relation to streets and spaces.

The UDF should establish clear typologies for the design of streets and spaces based on a hierarchy. For Blessington, this may include:

- **Main Street**, as the key town centre route and focus of retail activity in the town
- **Newtown Square**, as a secondary route connecting to the Town Centre Development, and
- **Shared streets**, a potential new typology reflecting the desire to provide greater permeability for walkers and wheelers and improve character.

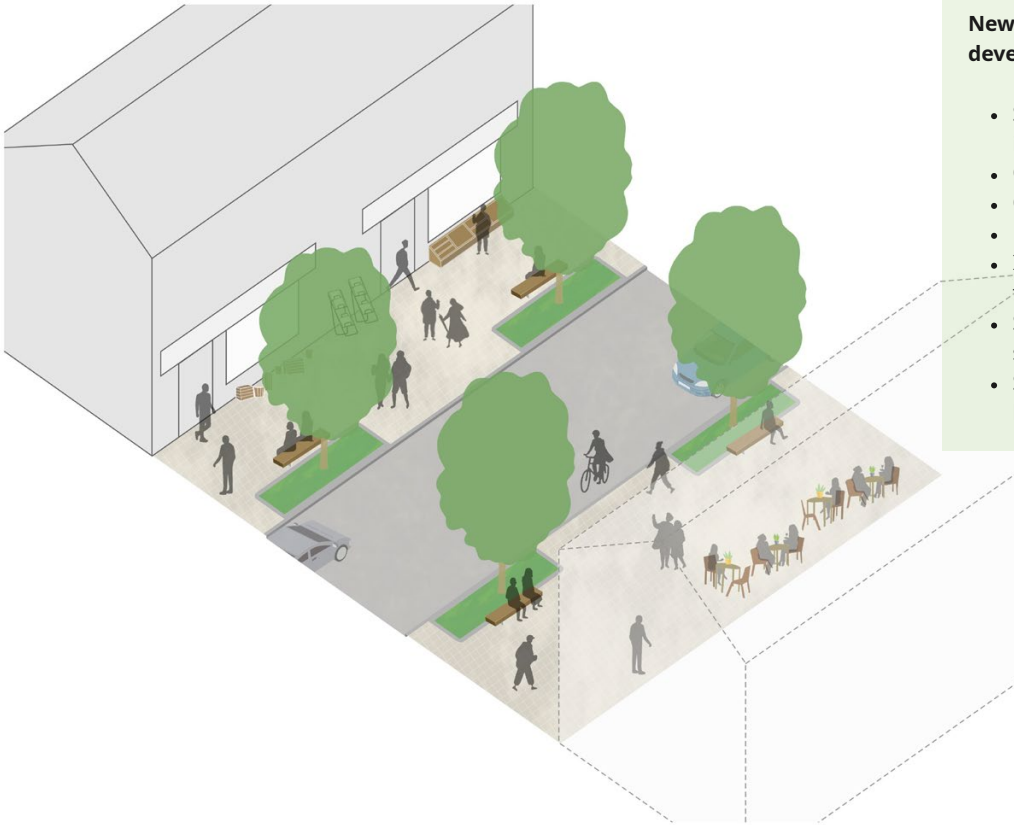
Objectives

This Project would achieve the following objectives of the Blessington TCF Plan:



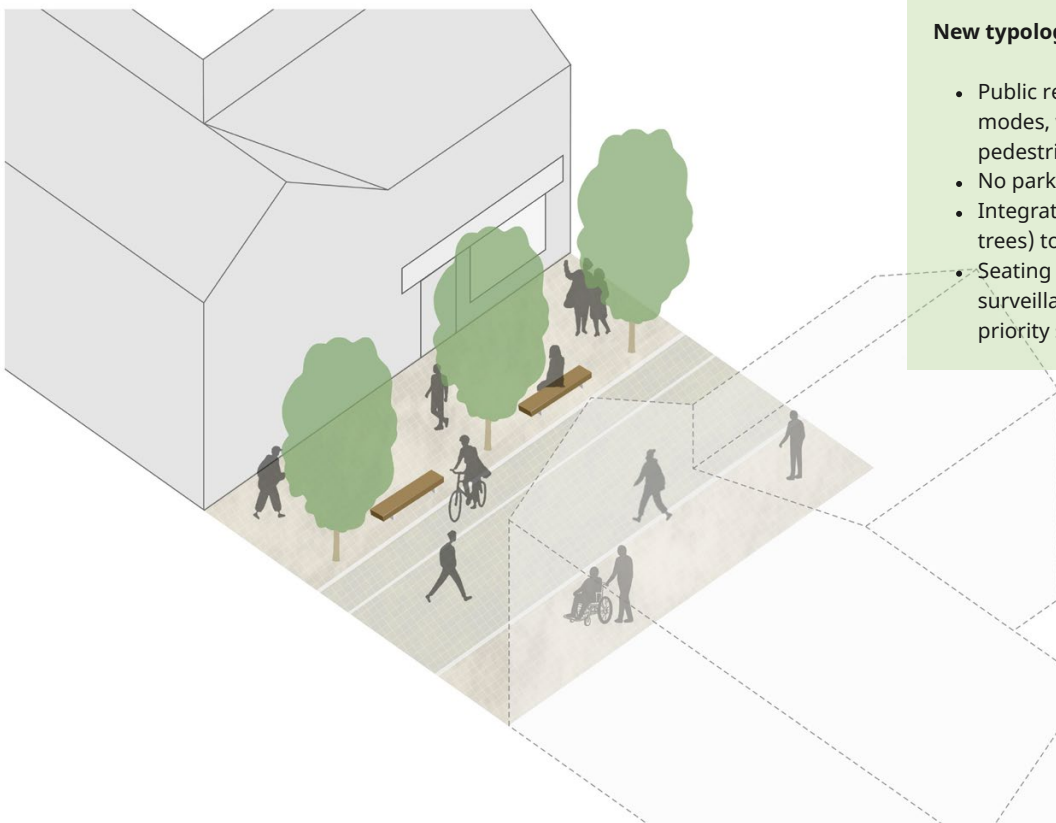
Main Street

- Primary pedestrian and cycle route in Blessington
- Generous footpath widths
- Off road cycle way connecting to E:Greenway
- Parallel parking bays
- Integration of urban greening (street trees, wildflower verges, etc)
- Seating along route, for passive surveillance
- Spill out spaces for businesses.



Newtown Square (adjacent Town Centre development)

- Secondary pedestrian and cycle route in Blessington
- Generous footpath widths
- Cyclists share carriageway with vehicles
- Parallel parking bays (if required)
- Integration of urban greening (street trees, rain gardens, etc)
- Seating along route, for passive surveillance
- Spill out spaces on footpaths for businesses.



New typology: Shared Streets

- Public realm space shared across all modes, with priority given to pedestrians and cyclists
- No parking
- Integration of urban greening (street trees) to define spaces
- Seating along route, for passive surveillance - within a pedestrian priority space.

The UDF should review the findings of the Street Route Accessibility Audit (Sept 2019) commissioned by Blessington & District Forum. This document presents a useful audit of the town and catalogues observations for improvements relating to all areas within the vicinity of Main Street.

The document sets out aspirations to create a Universal Design Strategy and Action Plan and ensure that all developments within and around the town are expertly reviewed and monitored to ensure that they meet the highest standards of accessibility and universal design. This should include all designs, procurements, construction and services.

Lands at Stradbally Road Urban Design Framework and Masterplan
Laois County Council (LUC)

The Framework sets out the design principles for a new sustainable residential community, town park and sports complex in Portlaoise that meets the needs of local people whilst being resilient to economic, social and climate change challenges.

Overall, the Masterplan and UDF considered the following:

- Maximising the residential potential of the site
- Developing walking and cycling infrastructure within the site to ensure sustainable connectivity
- Improving the existing built environment through retrofitted hard and soft landscape treatments
- Minimising the impacts of any proposed development on ecological and heritage assets.



Northgate Urban Design Framework and Masterplan
Darlington (LUC)

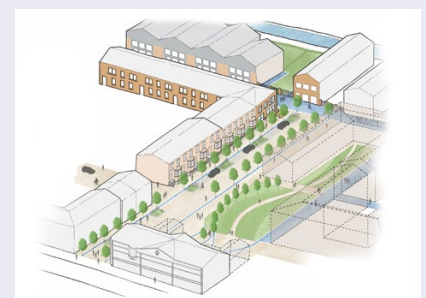
Northgate is located to the immediate north of Darlington town centre, with part of the masterplan located within the Northgate Conservation Area. Despite its geographical and historical prominence, the area has become run-down with a high degree of physical dilapidation.

The Urban Design Framework (UDF) establishes the design principles for future masterplan proposals. Design principles identified in the UDF were as follows:

- Topography and built form
- Streets
- Public realm
- Green and Blue Infrastructure
- Boundary treatments
- Parking
- Materiality



Redefining Georgian terraces to enhance streetscapes



Garden Street, marrying the old with new design



Cocker Beck riverside public realm improvements

The Masterplan focused on the development of the project's aims and objective into an illustrative design response. The main focus was on realising the opportunities found within the historical built form and riverside setting. This was a conservation-led management approach which promotes regeneration.

COST	■	□	□	□
TIMEFRAME	■	□	□	□
IMPACT	■	■	■	■
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DRCD RRDF • Town and Village Renewal Scheme 			
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Wicklow CC			

3 Placemaking Projects

Project Overview

Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximise shared value.

More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.

Many of the featured projects within the TCF Plan have placemaking qualities.

Projects identified as most aligned to placemaking are featured here and include:

1. *Public Realm Enhancements to Market Square*
2. *Shop Frontage Strategy*
3. *Town Branding Project.*

Engagement and consultation on these opportunities will be essential to the successful application of placemaking principles. The Blessington Town Team should have a central role in the creation of meaningful development.

Collaboration and Communication

There were a number of potential projects identified through the CTCHC Phase 2 which could be addressed by Placemaking projects.

This includes:

- Market Square Development
- Public Realm Enhancements
- Reduce Visual Clutter & Underground Cables
- Enhance Heritage and Sense of Place
- Shop Front Strategy
- Signage Strategy
- Promote 'Green Blessington.'

Public consultation has indicated that the creation of a civic space or public plaza in the centre of the town was another project which received support from attendees on the day, in tandem with improving the overall condition and appearance of the footpaths and introducing more cycling infrastructure in and around the town centre.



Market Square with focal points comprising Boyle Monument (NIAH Recommended Protected Structure) and a prominent mature lime tree. Existing street trees are considered an integral part of the character of the town.



Main Street is enhanced by significant buildings such as Market House (now Credit Union), a Protected Structure. Details such as the materials, door cases, windows, particularly where these are original or older and the carriage arches at intervals along the street make a significant contribution to sense of place.



Although without a market, on-street trading is evidenced on site, making use of the high volume of parking bays. The derelict Downshire Hotel is another significant building fronting onto Main Street.

1. Public Realm Enhancements to Market Square

Project Brief

The brief for Market Square will be:

- to create a high quality focal point and public realm space in the heart of the town
- to afford greater permeability to walkers and wheelers building upon Blessington's high walkability value
- to improve the setting of key landmark buildings in the vicinity, and
- to maximise the spatial potential of the town centre to better support local businesses and the community.

Re-allocating space to prioritise the movement of people means greater footfall potential and opportunity to create a more attractive, people-friendly environment. Pedestrian flow is improved and there is greater potential for businesses to incorporate outdoor dining.

Including provision for a shelter and electrical pop-up within the Square will future proof the central site for events and market trading. Town centre wi-fi and SMART features will bring both economic and community benefit.

Other potential improvements include:

- Tree planting and rain gardens to ensure the town is resilient to the climate change and biodiversity loss crises.
- Bespoke and unique integrated light features to attract footfall and the night time economy.
- Spaces to be used flexibly by local businesses for outdoor dining opportunities.
- Fixed seating to provide a space for people to gather.



Next steps

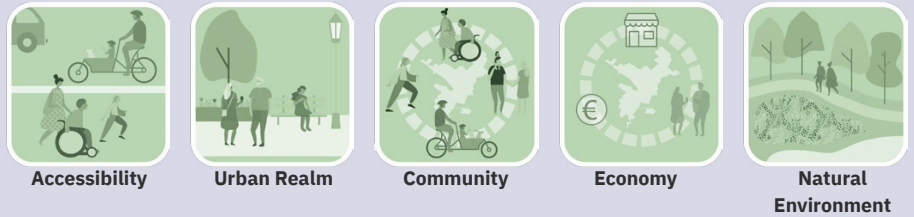
In order to secure investment for the Market Square Public Realm Enhancement Project, an application to the Department of Rural and Community Development's RRDF is recommended.

The investment provided by the RRDF seeks to support project that can deliver transformative change in rural towns and villages, positioning them for further growth through regeneration and town centre renewal.

The types of projects supported by the RRDF include measures to address dereliction and vacancy and town centre residency projects. Breathing new life and vibrancy into rural town centres via the creation of a landmark public realm scheme will be viewed as a key project outcome.

Objectives

This Project would achieve the following objectives of the Blessington TCF Plan:



Cobh Public Realm Enhancement Plan, Cork County Council

An exciting new urban design to enhance the public realm of Cobh's town centre has been developed by Cork County Council, with a people-centred approach that promises to make Cobh a more attractive town in which to live, work, visit and invest.

The key driver was moving away from vehicular prioritisation within the town centre: *"If you plan towns for cars and traffic, you get cars and traffic.... If you plan for people and places, you get people and places"* Fred Kent, Project for Public Spaces.

Consultation formed a key part of the design development, bringing local residents, businesses and community organisations together to consider requirements within the public realm.



Cobh waterfront public realm improvements by night



Cobh Casement Square public realm improvements

Ennistymon Public Realm Improvements, Offaly County Council

In 2021 Ennistymon was awarded funding under the Destination Towns Programme to improve the town's public realm. The works aim to enhance the visual attractiveness of the town, promote the rich heritage and improve pedestrian movement. Extensive consultation with the community and key stakeholders has been undertaken to ensure outputs are audience specific.

The project has focused on increasing dwell time in the town and reducing vehicle dominance through the creation of attractive spaces designed for pedestrians. The widening of existing footpaths has also resulted in the creation of outdoor street cafes and additional opportunities for markets and events.

Key to the project was the undergrounding of overhead utilities to minimise street clutter within the main public realm enhancement areas. High quality street lighting has been utilised to promote night time use.



Consultation on Public realm improvements in Ennistymon

COST	■ ■ ■ ■
TIMEFRAME	■ ■ ■ □
IMPACT	■ ■ ■ ■
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DRCD RRDF • Town and Village Renewal Scheme
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Wicklow CC

2. Shop Front Strategy

Project Brief

Terraced development along Main Street is reasonably homogenous in character, having developed over a short space of time in the early 19th century. The land use along Main Street is predominantly commercial (specifically retail and food & drink) and residential to a lesser extent.

In the interest of retaining the richness of the traditional streetscape, a Shop Front Strategy is proposed.

A Blessington Shop Front Strategy would provide guidance for existing or new business owners on best design principles for their shop signage, colour schemes, details, windows, illumination and interaction with the streetscape. A Strategy focused on this aspect will provide local people with the opportunity to collectively enhance the town's visual appearance, reflecting historic or unique character.

Improving the visual appearance of urban streetscapes, focusing on shop fronts and street facades, has the potential to increase community pride and confidence, making small towns such as Blessington more attractive places to live, work and do business.

Strategic direction is required in order to assist local landowners with guidance on best practice relating to the following:

- Painting buildings or shopfronts
- Commissioning murals
- Upgrading or restoring shopfronts
- Enhancing entrances/terraces with planting
- Illuminating architectural features
- Installing canopies and street furniture
- Decluttering shopfronts with removal of unnecessary signs / wires.

Existing shop front design guidance within the Wicklow County Development Plan could be repurposed and updated ensuring it is both easy to access and use. Further information should also be provided within the guide to enable businesses to access funding to support improvements.

Objectives

This Project would achieve the following objectives of the Blessington TCF Plan:



Collaboration and Communication

The desire to enhance the visual appearance of Blessington's shops was identified by the community early in the CTCHC process.

The value of improving the facades of properties along Main Street to ensure it is enhanced as a key destination for the local community and visitors was evidenced and embraced. Improving the appearance of derelict properties was also identified as important.



Characterful shop frontages in Blessington

COST	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
TIMEFRAME	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
IMPACT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For procurement of Strategy: Local Government • For funding enhancements: DRCD Streetscape Enhancement Measure
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Wicklow CC, Local Businesses

County Kildare Shopfront Guidelines, Kildare County Council

The art of good shopfront design has declined in Kildare. Retailers have sought to dominate the streetscape with over-scaled fascias, garish colours and over use of signage, similarly the inappropriate reproduction frontages harm the genuine historic facades whilst many contemporary interventions failed to accommodate signage adequately or relate to their wider host building.

The Design Guide is intended to encourage and guide shop owners and designers to maintain the character and appearance of traditional shopfronts and to improve the quality of new shopfront designs so that they respect and enhance their surroundings. Guidelines also promote enhanced accessibility.



3. Town Branding Strategy

Project Brief

Founded in the 17th century by Michael Boyle, Archbishop of Dublin and Former Lord Chancellor of Ireland, Blessington is a town with a rich history. The town originated as a large country house, Downshire House, surrounded by a landscape demesne or parkland. It was an early example of the trend that would become more popular in the 18th century. The linear settlement of Blessington village was also established from this time.

Blessington is also located close to natural attractions and amenities such as the Wicklow Mountains, Blessington Lake and the Blessington Greenway, a 6.5km walking trail which connects Blessington with Russborough House. The proposed greenway extension around the Lake is another potential branding opportunity which is unique to the town.

Town branding is a useful way of celebrating the town's significant heritage and local and regional attractions. This could be used to better promote Blessington as a destination town within the wider area, recognising it is located strategically within the region.

Town branding would help to make Blessington more legible for pedestrians and more recognisable as a destination to visitors. Managing visual clutter should form a key aspect of the town branding strategy.

Town branding within the public realm could be improved through the use of relevant and relatable iconography to strengthen the sense of locality and identity. Icons could be integrated into wayfinding, sculpture and seating to create a consistent effect across the public realm.

Objectives

This Project would achieve the following objectives of the Blessington TCF Plan:



Collaboration and Communication

Establishing consistency across the town's suite of signage with the aim of decluttering, simplifying and conveying something uniquely Blessington was considered a priority project for the town. In this way, the town would be finding its unique identity, or unique selling point.

There were a number of potential projects identified through the CTCHC Phase 2 which could be addressed by a Town Branding Strategy, including:

- Reduce visual clutter and underground cables
- Town Branding / Signage Strategy
- Enhance history and heritage and sense of place (creating a story)
- 'Green Blessington'
- Signage / visual information panels for flora and fauna.

The Blessington History Society is a local community group who meet in the town on a monthly basis. It is recommended that members of this group are actively involved in collaborations on the content of a Town Branding Strategy.

Blessington is also part of the Wicklow passport where participants can drive, walk or cycle to collect stamps from across Wicklow discovering attractions and activities along the way.

Ireland's Ancient East, Various, Fáilte Ireland

The project was a unique opportunity to offer visitors a compelling reason to visit the eastern and southern regions of Ireland. Fáilte Ireland developed an umbrella destination brand called 'Ireland's Ancient East' (IAE) rooted in the rich history and diverse cultural heritage synonymous with this part of Ireland.

The purpose of the signage is to:

- Bring the IAE brand to life and make it more visible to visitors.
- Cross-sell nearby tourist attractions and points of interest, thereby encouraging visitors to explore the wider area.
- Present the story of Ireland's Ancient East.

The signage is bespoke, formed from a 3D interpretation of the Celtic inspired Ireland's Ancient East brand logo combined with a spiral of information to engage the visitor and encourage them to interact with the installation. It is installed at approx. 100 key sites.

COST	■ □ □ □
TIMEFRAME	■ □ □ □
IMPACT	■ ■ ■ □
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DRCD RRDF • Town and Village Renewal Scheme
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Wicklow CC, Town Team



Bespoke IAE signage, Co Meath

4 Activating the Town Centre

Project Overview & Objectives

Introduction

Although Blessington's town centre vacancy rate is lower than the national average, the visual effects of vacancy are compounded by the proliferation of gap sites and empty buildings at the heart of the town centre.

Prominent, landmark buildings, such as the former Ulster Bank and Downshire Hotel on Main Street are vacant. These buildings make a significant contribution to character of the town centre through their height, siting or set back from the building line. Their vacancy must be addressed by the TCF Plan.

Objectives

This Project would achieve the following objectives of the Blessington TCF Plan:

Accessibility **Urban Realm** **Community** **Economy** **Natural Environment**

Within the retail core of the town centre, there are a number of opportunity sites which could be developed to better support the town's economic function whilst also strengthening the cohesiveness of the historic town centre with the new town centre development.

The absence of development within the heart of the town centre is further compounded by an absence of connectivity or walkability between Main Street and parallel routes to the north west. Planning for activating this area with pedestrian and cycling priority routes is recommended to support future footfall.

There is also development potential within the long linear plots of Main Street, specifically between Dempsey's and the former Ulster Bank building. In order to promote compact growth within the town, these backland areas have huge potential for residential development.

Collaboration and Communication

Reducing dereliction alongside the desire to expand on the retail and service offering in the town was a key issue for both business owners' and residents' surveys. Residents felt particularly strongly about repurposing vacant and/or derelict buildings in the town centre, particularly those of cultural or historical importance such as the currently empty Ulster Bank and the Downshire Hotel.

When asked whether their needs as a consumer were being met in Blessington, 55.6% indicated that there was scope for improvement. Residents felt an increase in variety within the restaurant and retail offer were required, alongside more leisure amenities.

Public consultation highlighted the absence of a dedicated facility for the arts with suggestions a vacant town centre building could be repurposed into a centre for art exhibitions, theatre, music, etc.



The prominence of vehicle parking creates passive spaces and barriers to movement.

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TIMEFRAME	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
IMPACT	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private developer • DCRD RRDF • Croí Cónaithe (for derelict properties to be made available for rent)
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Wicklow CC

The Brief

'Activating the Town Centre' looks at redeveloping key sites and buildings within the heart of the town centre, with a key objective of presenting the opportunities associated with their activation, and setting out broad design principles to guide development.

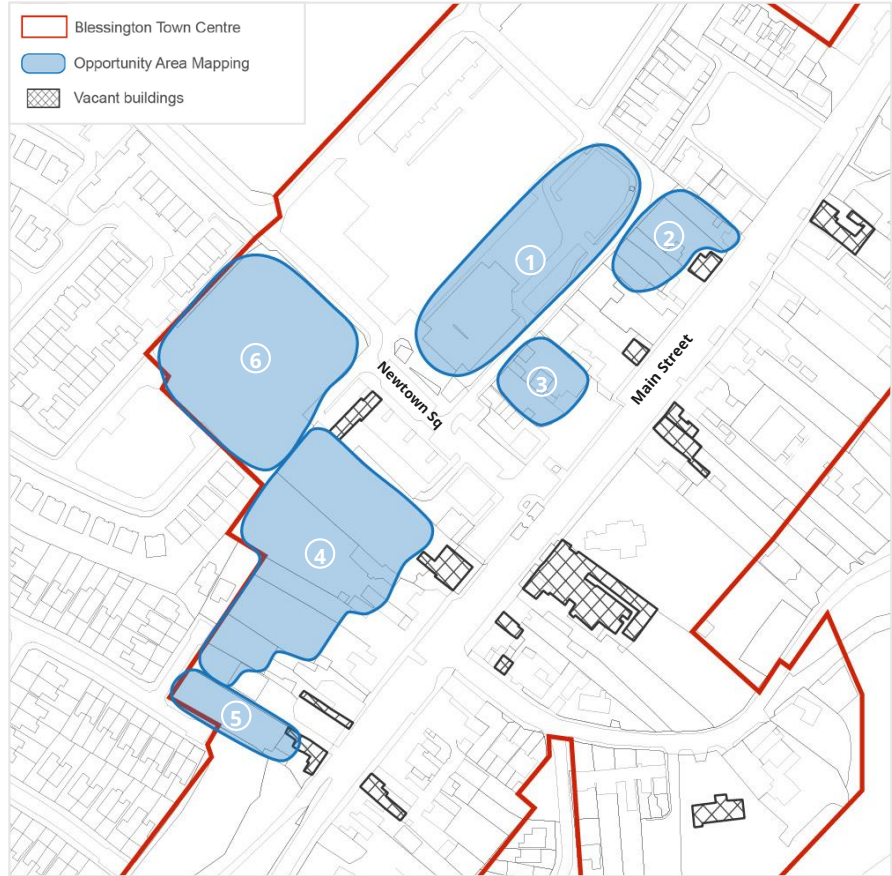
The key sites include:

- Opportunity Site 1 Blessington Town Centre
- Opportunity Site 2 Main Street
- Opportunity Site 3 Market Square
- Opportunity Site 4 Downshire Lodge
- Opportunity Site 5 Dempsey's
- Opportunity Site 6 Downshire Park
- Former Ulster Bank building.

Opportunity Sites 1 - 6 are located on privately owned land which presents challenges for Wicklow CC in terms of delivering consistent and connected designs.

It is the intention of the TCF Plan to set out the broad principles for ensuring high design quality recognising the unifying objectives that each site has to meet along with the public realm between those spaces.

In order to ensure consistent development, the Opportunity sites are grouped as necessary in order to demonstrate the desire for the areas to be developed as a cohesive masterplan. In addition, Opportunity Sites 4 - 6 are linked and could together form one Opportunity area.



Boyle 2040, County Roscommon
Roscommon County Council

Boyle is located within the northern part of Roscommon County and is rich in historical assets. A vacancy audit undertaken in 2020 indicated that the residential vacancy level in the Town Core, which is the focus for the Boyle 2040 Plan) is 80%.

The Boyle 2040 Plan envisions a gradual reversal of this process through attracting people back to live and invest in the core town centre areas. This significant town regeneration project will undertake a series of linked projects, including the refurbishment and conversion of the old Royal Hotel into an Enterprise Centre, exhibition space, information point and coffee dock, and the creation of a new riverside promenade, which will link the town centre to key tourism attractions.

Re-activating the river corridor frontage, which development has traditionally turned its back on, and visioning it as a space for town centre living, walking and wheeling is central to the masterplan.



Opportunity Sites 1 - 3

Opportunity Site 1 is largely comprised of surface car parking, access roads to a multi-storey car park, and residual green areas/road verges.

The site occupies a prominent position located between the large scale town centre development (Dunnes store) and the historic town centre. Its current use as surface car parking (on land currently zoned for town centre uses) represents a break between the built-up area of the Main Street/Market Square and the Town Centre development, resulting in two poorly connected areas of the retail core and a visually discordant feature.

It is also a key location for movement across the town centre, with the entrance to St. Mary's Senior National School and the Tramway Theatre located immediately to the north, retail units to the west and south, and access to Blessington Main Street to the south-east. The current use is not conducive to these movements.



Surface level car park presents a passive space between the historic town centre and new town centre development.



Desire line from St Mary's Senior School and the Tramway Theatre with no consideration of pedestrian permeability or connectivity to the historic town centre.

Opportunity Site 2 is located on Main Street just south of St. Joseph's Road and is currently occupied by three derelict buildings which face onto Main Street.

The site has approximately 30m frontage onto Main Street and would present an excellent opportunity to provide a pedestrian and cycle route linking Main Street to better connect the historic town centre with the new town centre development.

Retention and reactivation of the existing derelict two storey development along Main Street is key. Opening up the backlands associated with the properties would generate development opportunities along the connecting route.

These lands would be suitable for both commercial and residential uses with the key development criteria being the creation of new active façades and safe walking and cycling routes.



Existing vacant development along Main Street to be retained and enhanced with the potential to open up access to backlands.

Opportunity Site 3 is located on Blessington Market Square and is currently occupied by one structure (a two storey attractive vernacular house 'The Forge') with attendant lands that are partially used as a yard.

The site has approximately 40m frontage onto Market Square and is a key site in need of regeneration and redevelopment in the town centre, being at the most prominent location and with the most potential to bring about a transformative change in the overall impression and image of the town centre.

The site provides a connection through to site Opportunity Site 1 and presents an opportunity to link a revitalised Market Square (refer to Project 3) to the new town centre development.

These lands would be suitable for both commercial and residential uses with the key development criteria being the creation of new active façades along all ground floors.



Existing vacant yard space adjacent to the Market House (Credit Union building) providing a key site line towards the new town centre development.



Existing yard space adjacent to the Forge, a private residential development on the Square.

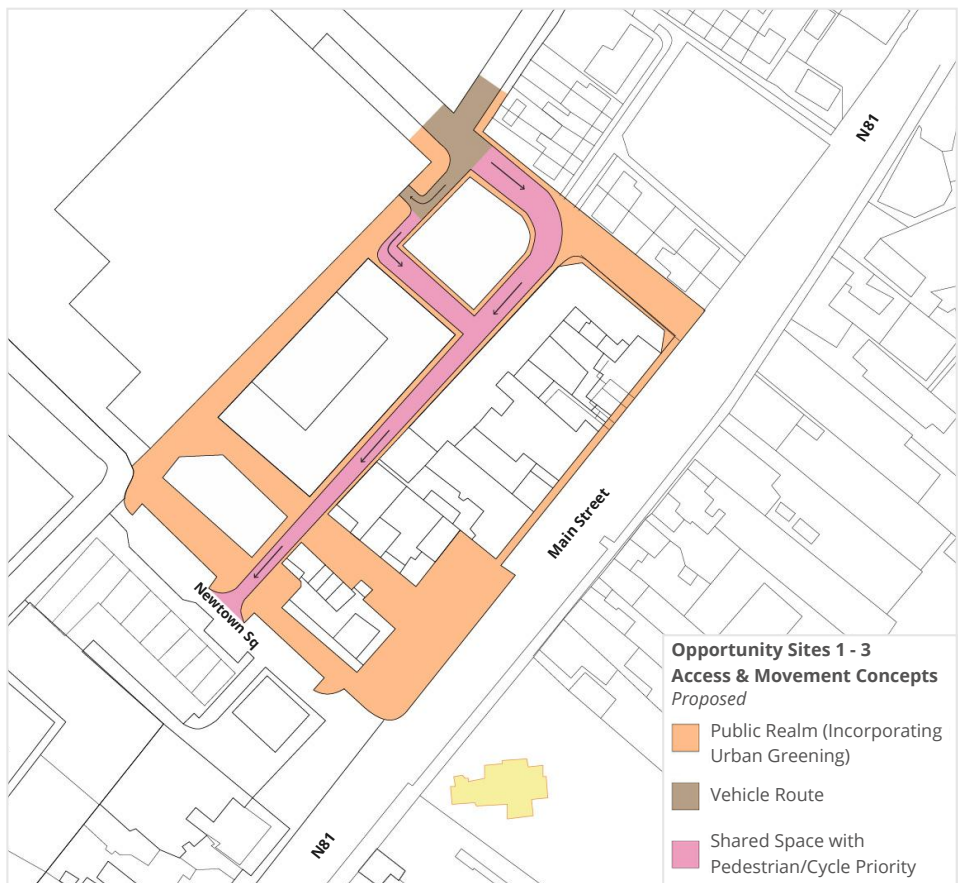
Recommendations

A Concept Parameters Plan and Access & Movement Plan demonstrates the potential opportunity afforded by these three sites collectively.

Future development must address the following:

- Provision for compact, in-fill, mixed-use development to expand the retail, commercial and community offering within the retail core, alongside residential development.
- Greater integration between existing historic development along Main Street and the town centre development, achieved through an appreciation of the built line, the pattern of development and approach to massing.
- Maximising active frontages at ground floor level and ensure an appropriate architectural response to both the Blessington ACA and the new town centre development.
- Improvements to the public realm in favour of pedestrian and cyclist priority through and around the site supporting connections to Main Street, the school and the new town park.
- Creating shared spaces, where vehicles make use of spaces designed for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Improvements in the quantum of greening within the town centre. Green space would need to be robust and appropriate to the setting, such as street trees, rain gardens or a linear urban greenspace.
- Enhancing the biodiversity and ecological network within the town centre to support a green space and habitat network.
- Creating a safe, walkable town centre environment which brings benefits to the community.

From a landuse perspective, Opportunity Site 1 is considered to be suitable for a wide range of commercial, retail, community, tourism and residential use, subject to the provision of adequate active uses to all frontages.



Opportunity Site 4 - 6

Opportunity Site 4 comprises the backlands of a number of properties along the Main Street, most of which are in commercial use, and include a bank, Garda Station, two pubs and a range of small retail / retail services units.

Long linear plots along Main Street demonstrate the potential for land to be assembled in a co-ordinated manner to pursue opportunities for sustainable residential in-fill development.

For the most part, the buildings along the Main Street are older, vernacular buildings and the majority are considered worthy of retention for architectural, historical and streetscape reasons. There are a number of gaps along the street frontage which provide rear access to businesses.

Such routes could be maximised to open up pedestrian and cycling access to potential development sites at the rear and provide for enhancement permeability within the town centre.

Opening up vehicular access is critical and requires a joined-up approach with Opportunity Sites 5 and 6.



Underused spaces to the rear of development along Main Street.

Opportunity Site 5 comprises Dempsey's, a plot of land with a commercial property and Protected Structure built in 1790 facing onto Main Street.

The property is located at the end of the block and lies adjacent to a linear green space and pedestrian footpath which runs along the former alignment of the Naas Road. The site exhibits similar characteristics to Opportunity Site 4 - a commercial building with on-street frontage set on a long linear plot.

In addition, this site connects directly to another public road (Beechdale Close) which present an opportunity to better connect residents from this area to Main Street, the new town centre development and Market Square area.

Activation of this parcel of land has the potential to enhance the neighbouring green space through access improvements which will bring greater surveillance.



Dempsey's is considered a Building of Special Importance by the Blessington ACA, featuring a timber panelled central door with fanlight over a moulded surround.



The Old Naas Road adjacent to Dempsey's, which lies adjacent to an underused green space (right of picture).

Opportunity Site 6 comprises Downshire Park, a large undeveloped 'greenfield' site located directly opposite the Dunnes anchored development, surrounded by developed lands on three sides.

Adjacent land to the north and west is predominantly residential, laid out on cul-de-sacs. The site demonstrates potential in enhancing the town centre access for those residents.

Given the site's location adjoining the Core Retail Area, an 'active' use of the ground floor is desirable to maintain a vibrant and supervised street frontage, which could include commercial and community uses.

The key development criterion for this site is the need for to provide for a vehicular route through to Opportunity Sites 4 and 5.



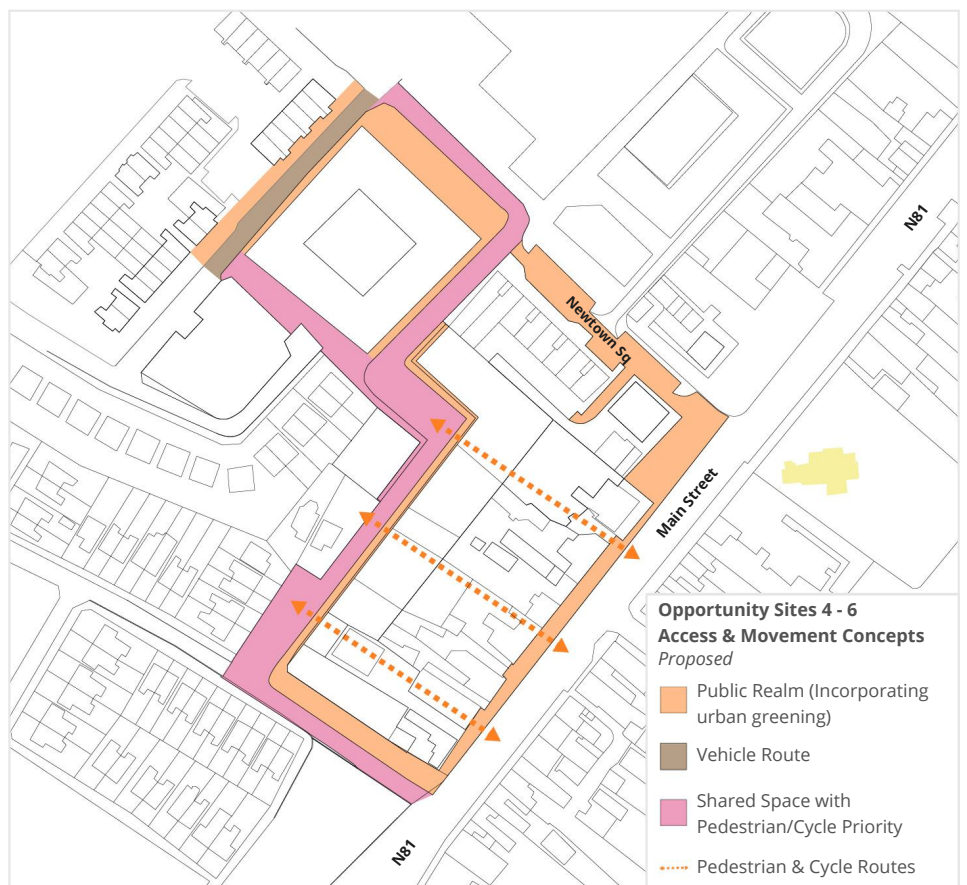
Opportunity Site 6 lies within the middle ground of the photograph - the hoardings of which provide a focal point for those driving along Newtown Square.

Recommendations

A Concept Parameters Plan and Access & Movement Plan demonstrates the potential opportunity afforded by these three sites collectively.

Future development must address the following:

- Provision for compact, in-fill predominantly residential development.
- Ensuring an appropriate architectural response to the Blessington ACA and the any development which impacts a Protected Structure or its setting.
- Sympathetic development which works with the scale of adjacent built form and local topography, respecting views out to the local landscape (north west).
- Reconnection of the urban form along Newtown Square with an appreciation of the built line, the pattern of development and approach to massing.
- Maximising active frontages at ground floor level.
- Improvements to the public realm in favour of pedestrian and cyclist priority through and around the site supporting connections to Main Street and the town centre.
- Creating shared spaces, where vehicles make use of spaces designed for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Incorporating a modal filter on any vehicle connection with Main Street.
- Enhancing the biodiversity and ecological network within the town centre to support a green space and habitat network.
- Creating a safe, walkable town centre environment which brings benefits to the community.



A New Era for the former Ulster Bank Building



Sketch outlining the development potential of the former Ulster Bank

Project Brief

The former Ulster Bank building is a prominent landmark building dating from c. 1830. It is on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) and is a Protected Structure. It is an optimum example within the town centre where the 'civic, commercial and spiritual importance is highlighted by their height, siting or setback from the building line' (Blessington ACA).

The attractive detached, five-bay, two-storey former Downshire Lodge, was converted to a hotel in the late nineteenth century and became a bank on 1918. It has been vacant since the bank's closure in 2021. Reactivating this building and finding an appropriate use is essential for reducing the negative impact vacancy can generate, but also in generating activation for the proposed public realm space at Market Square (Project 3).

Enriching the evening economy is a key objective due to its prominent location in the town.

Recommendations

- Suitable land use comprises retail, hospitality or community uses to the ground floor and residential or office space to the upper floor.
- Ensuring an appropriate architectural response to mitigate any potential negative impact on the Protected Structure or its setting.
- Retention of high quality architectural features to convey sense of place.
- Providing a more direct access route from the entrance to connect to potential spill out space which makes full use of the proposed public realm.

Cappoquin Regeneration Project, Co Waterford

Cappoquin Regeneration Company Ltd was established by Cappoquin Community Development Company in 2019. The sole aim of this Company is to address the issues of vacancy / dereliction / underuse of properties in Cappoquin Town.

The Cappoquin Regeneration Company Mission Statement is:

"We envision working with and on behalf of the local community in reinvigorating and regenerating the town of Cappoquin by purchasing and refurbishing underused / vacant / derelict properties, bringing them back into active use as residential / commercial entities, improving the public realm and thus making Cappoquin an attractive place for families and individuals to live in, work in and enjoy its natural amenities and its activities and also an attractive place to visit, by collaborating with stakeholders such as relevant Government Departments, Waterford City and County Council, Waterford Leader Partnership and the Tomar Trust".

Funding of over €5 million is being provided to convert three derelict town centre buildings including a former Hotel, Pub and Department Store into a suitable mix of modern, energy efficient residential accommodation.

The Cappoquin Regeneration Project will also the development of 'over the shop' living accommodation in the town centre as well as the renovation of three historic town houses on the main street. The focus of the investment is in combating vacancy and dereliction by regenerating iconic town centre buildings.

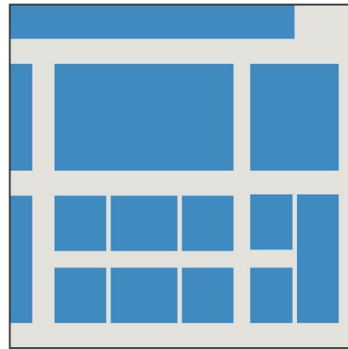


Refurbished residential accommodation in Cappoquin

General Principles for New Development

Historic Fabric

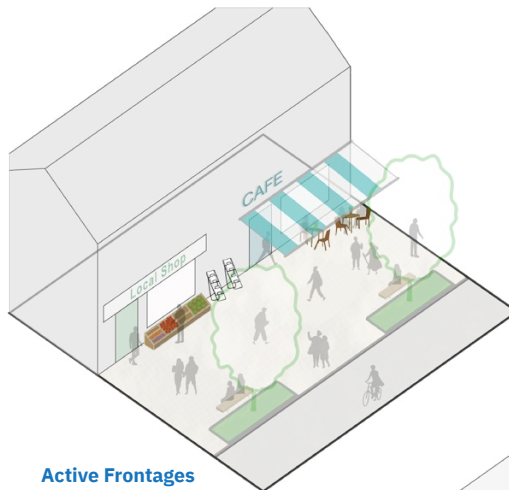
- The survival of historic fabric and form is key to retaining sense of place within the Blessington ACA and its setting. The existing fabric should be adapted to develop proposals for change.
- New development should be high quality, reflect its context, incorporate appropriate architectural detailing and mirror rooflines.
- A finer grained pattern of development should be reflected within new development located in proximity to older properties.



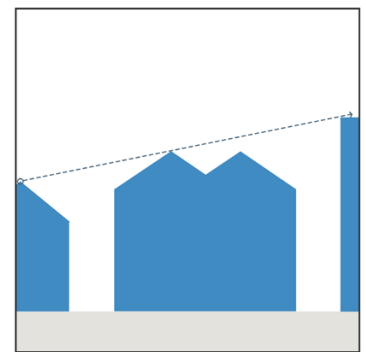
Historic Fabric

Scale and Massing

- New development should connect with the surrounding neighbourhood by respecting and maintaining building lines and heights, established plot sizes, rhythm and setting.
- Development layouts and heights should promote positive skyline landmarks such as St. Mary's Church and the Wicklow / Kildare landscape to the north west.



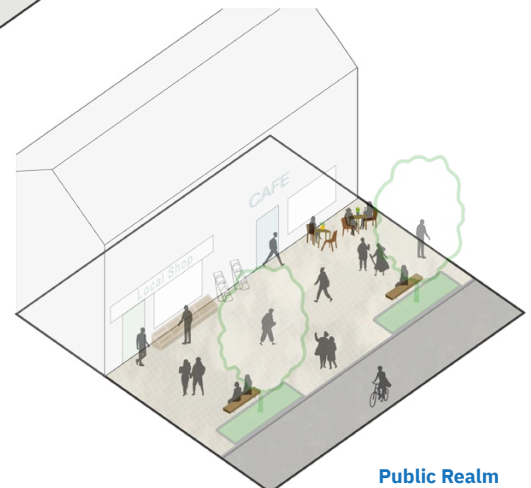
Active Frontages



Scale and Massing

Public Realm

- The facades of building, in particular those that face onto the public realm will help to define the streetscape. Buildings should be of high quality and present an active frontage.



Public Realm

Urban Greening

- The design of public realm space should include multi-functional uses (markets, events, gathering, café culture) encouraging pedestrian participation, and inviting activity.
- Promoting an evening economy and encouraging a population around these spaces will extend the activity within these spaces and ensure natural surveillance.



Urban Greening

Above: Diagrams representing the general principles for new development

5 Supporting Community Amenity

Project Overview & Objectives

Introduction

Blessington is the fifth most populated town in Wicklow with a current population of 5,611 (2022 census). It is a growing town and a desirable location to live, given the proximity to Dublin, on-the-doorstep amenities and access to the Wicklow landscape.

The quantum and availability of community amenities will need to keep pace with the growing population. There are a myriad of existing community assets within the town which should be enhanced and expanded to ensure there are no deficiencies in community provision.

The proposed E:Greenway has the potential to generate greater footfall which will benefit the town centre economy. Exploring ways to ensure the Greenway has a knock-on impact for community benefit is also essential.

Sustainable energy generation should also be considered, in order to better position the town in terms of minimising its carbon footprint, but also as a source of income generation which has the potential to fund additional town centre opportunities of community benefit.

Projects identified as most aligned to supporting community amenity are featured here and include:

- A Hub for the Greenway
- Proposed Leisure Centre
- My Town App
- Community Energy Plan.

The Blessington & District Forum is a community-based voluntary body comprises 32 members and facilitates all matters in relation to community and societal development. They are key stakeholders in relation to this Project.

Objectives

This Project would achieve the following objectives of the Blessington TCF Plan:



Accessibility



Urban Realm



Community



Economy



Natural Environment

Communication and Collaboration

There were a number of relevant community-focused projects identified through the CTCHC Phase 2 including:

- Leisure centre
- My Town App
- Develop a Park Network
- Temporary use of vacant properties.

Recent responses to residents' surveys highlighted the following as key issues for resolution within the TCF Plan:

- A lack of activities and reasons to come into the town. This is particularly noticeable for teenagers and young people, and leads to a perceived high level of anti-social behaviour, particularly around the Dunnes Stores area.
- A strong desire to see the development of new amenities and facilities for young people and, in particular, for a swimming pool.

Public consultation also highlighted the absence of a dedicated facility for the arts. It was suggested that one of the town centre buildings which are currently not in use could be acquired and repurposed into a centre for art exhibitions and music.

The overarching perception of Blessington was one of a town with a vibrant community spirit and significant potential for growth, but there were concerns over the rate at which the population of the town has grown over recent decades without a corresponding expansion of facilities and amenities, particularly for young people.



Discrete entrance to Blessington Library adjacent Dunnes Store on Newtown Square



St Kevin's Community Centre, Main Street

A Hub for the Greenway

Project Brief

Developing a Greenway Hub along the route of the proposed E:Greenway, and close to Blessington Town Centre, will provide ancillary features aligned to the active travel route.

Such a facility would support walking and cycling, providing toilet and washrooms, cycle repair facilities and bike rental services.

Exploring how the Greenway Hub could also provide community benefit is also recommended, looking at integrating the following types of community assets:

- food growing areas
- play facilities
- sheltered picnic spaces, and
- a youth hub.

There are examples within the town of how shared uses can be facilitated to maximise efficiency, such as the Tramway Theatre's location within St Mary's National School.

Providing multiple functions for the Greenway building will streamline the delivery of services within the town, thereby making it more resilient and likely to prosper.



Sketch outlining the potential development of the former HSE building

Barnagh Greenway Hub, Co. Limerick

The Barnagh Greenway Hub is located on a central part of the Limerick Greenway, providing facilities for the local communities and visitors alike.

The Hub offers car parking, bike rental, toilets, a playground, cafe, pottery studio, crazy golf and meeting room facilities.

It is often the focus for events such as 'Bike Week' in September where family-friendly events, bike maintenance classes, music and food are combined to encourage people to enjoy the Greenway.



Cafe, playground and crazy golf at Barnagh Greenway Hub

Recommendations

The public realm space fronting onto Kilbride Road should be welcoming and people-focused with minimal amount of vehicle parking areas. Provision of electric charge points for vehicles is advised, alongside sheltered cycle parking to convey the importance of active travel.

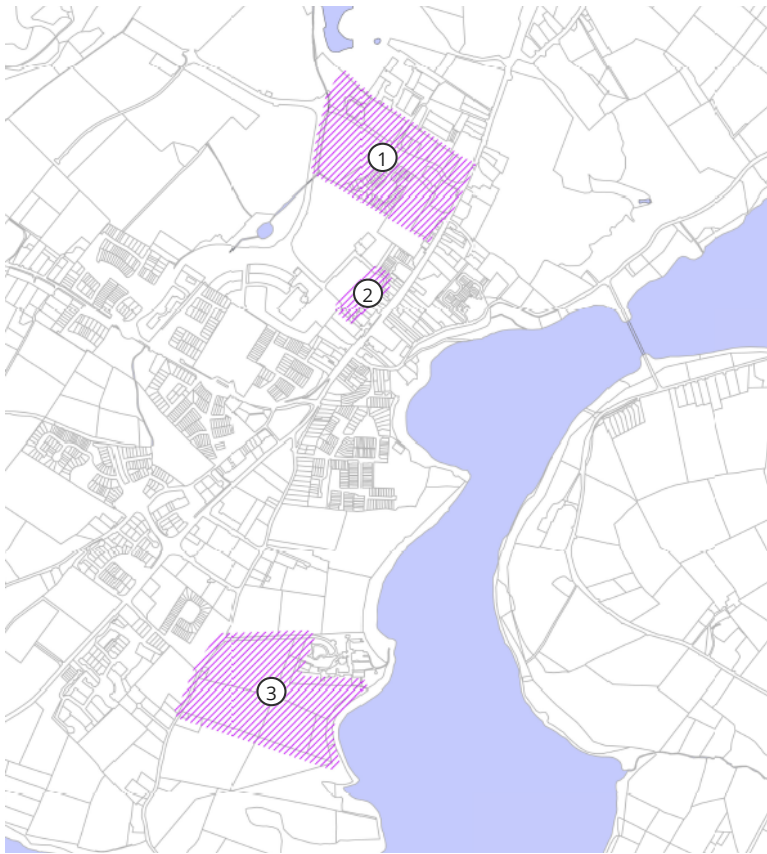
Use of the Hub for a café or commercial services provided within the town centre is not recommended, to encourage interaction with Main Street. However, operational viability may require a commercial function to the Hub.

Managing the area to better support sustainable water management and wildlife would be advantageous.

In addition, photovoltaic panels mounted onto the south facing roof space could be used to generate electricity for the Hub. The potential use of ground sourced heat should also be explored.

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IMPACT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCRD RRDF • Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 			
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Wicklow CC			

Proposed Leisure Centre



Location plan illustrating the potential location for a leisure centre in Blessington

Project Brief

The community desire for a Leisure Centre in the town is longstanding.

There are a number of potential locations for a Leisure Centre:

1. Within a cluster of community facilities on Oak Drive to the north of the town
2. Within the heart of the town centre and
3. Within Burgage lands on an undeveloped area of Wicklow council-owned land.

The benefits of a Leisure Centre along Oak Drive or within the town centre core is the ease of access due to the close proximity of the town centre and the new town park.

Land ownership is a key consideration, however. Land parcels on Oak Drive and in Burgage are to different degrees council owned, whereas the land within the town centre is privately owned.

Additionally, Oak Drive has fragmented ownership and therefore, its development would be subject to a partnership agreement with a private landowner.

Recommendations

The design for a Leisure Centre site should ensure:

- Ease of access to local road networks, bus routes and walking and cycle routes
- Ease of access to complimentary community facilities
- The site is of a sufficient size to provide car and cycle parking
- Active frontages to all facades of development if located within the town centre
- Any existing vegetation is retained to integrate the development into the setting
- Mitigation for any potential loss of vegetation or habitat, and any potential contamination of the water network
- Sustainable designs for the built form and external spaces
- Sustainable energy use and generation.

Nenagh Leisure Centre, Co. Tipperary

In 2015, the refurbished Nenagh Leisure Centre and adjoining town park was opened to the public.

The facilities are located on the outskirts of Nenagh, but within walking distance of the town centre. The Leisure Centre offers state of the art swimming and gym facilities with whole-family and accessible leisure opportunities.

The leisure centre is located on an 'island' site, surrounded by the River Nenagh and an overflow channel adjacent the Dublin rail line with several bridge links to the remainder of the town.

The project involved the reorientation of the original 1960s building to front onto the new town park to the east and the internal segregation of swimming and gym facilities. The new aerobics suite and extended gym now overlook the park.

The Leisure Centre is a Near Zero Energy Building (NZEB) due to a biomass boiler which provides 96% of its heating and 180 photovoltaic (PV) roof panels which source approximately 10% of its electricity needs.



Nenagh leisure centre and town park

COST	■ ■ ■ ■
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IMPACT	■ ■ ■ ■
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Government • DRCF RRDF • Sport Ireland • Ireland Active
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Wicklow CC

Community Energy Plan

Project Overview

Renewable electricity is a central element of the government's action on climate disruption, ensuring that ambitious climate targets are met. The Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS) lays the foundations of a thriving and cost effective renewable electricity market that supports the growth of the green economy, creates sustainable work opportunities, and ultimately benefits the consumer as the renewables become more and more cost effective.

Renewable energy is energy derived from natural resources that are replenished as a higher rate than they are consumed. Renewable energy projects can be delivered at a range of scales and, in Blessington, may comprise:

Domestic scale:

- Solar or Photovoltaic (PV) panels mounted onto roof surface
- Ground source heat pump
- Air source heat pump
- Biomass.

Strategic scale:

- Solar or Photovoltaic (PV) farms
- Wind farms
- District heating scheme.



St Joseph's Hall, Main Street



Blessington Boxing Club, Main Street

Funding opportunities

The Community Centre Investment Fund announced in December 2022 is a funding stream dedicated to enhancing existing Community Centre, Parish Halls, Scouts Clubs, Youth Hubs, Family Resource Centres and Sport Complexes across Ireland.

Retrofitting energy upgrades to heating systems and installation of electric vehicle charging points are examples of the type of work supported by the grant.

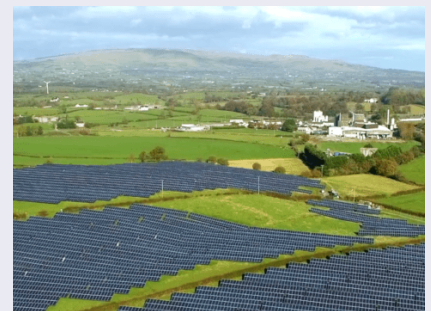
Claremorris & Western District Energy Co-operative Society, Claremorris, Co. Mayo

The town of Claremorris is fast becoming the green hub for the West of Ireland. In 2015, local residents began promoting greater usage of renewable energy across the region through the creation of the Claremorris and Western District Energy Co-operative Society.

The Co-op embarked on the development of an 'anaerobic digester' to demonstrate how waste products could generate energy.

The digester was put on display at agricultural fairs and schools across the region.

This initiative was followed by a new district heating system for the town and its environs based on renewable energy sources. The project enabled heating to be supplied to premises and buildings in Claremorris from a centralised source. The Co-op have also developed a solar farm on an old landfill site near the town and have planning permission for a second site.



Dale Farm, example of Community Solar Farm

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FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEADER • DRCD Community Centre Investment Fund • Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland 			
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Wicklow CC, Town Team			

My Town App

Project Overview

Due to the range and spread of community assets across Blessington, it may be difficult for those new to the area to understand what facilities are available and who to contact to make use of them. Making access easier will increase the capacity of community buildings to generate revenue, which could be reinvested into building improvements.

Blessington is a multicultural community, with the highest proportion of non-nationals in Wicklow (at 13.6%). Polish, French and Spanish are the most widely spoken foreign languages in Wicklow. Recreation and sport are activities which can often break down language barriers and generate a sense of community cohesion.

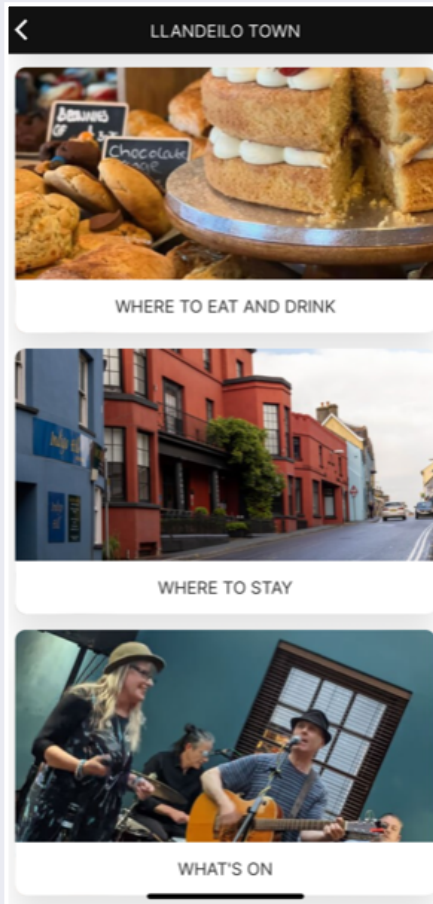
A digital app platform which provides real time information would provide a one-stop shop, and could comprise:

- Library opening hours and facilities
- Theatre opening hours and showings
- The range of activities offered by community centres across the town
- The range of activities offered by privately owned sports clubs
- Booking details, and
- Children's party booking information.

Additional information on businesses could be added, but within a separate directory.

My Town Apps, Various

The MyTownApp.uk is a digital community tool which provides information on local services that we require on a day-to-day basis, local directories including local government departments, medical centres, pharmacies and schools, and information on what's on in your local community.



Extract from Dyma Llandeilo App

Llandeilo Town Council have used the platform to create their own Town App aiming to help local businesses, local residents, and visitors alike by providing a huge amount of information about the town, various community organisations and local businesses. This information is combined in the My Town App to create a single point of reference for the local community.



Llandeilo Town

These apps will provide visitors with a wealth of knowledge about the town, but also localised insights as it is driven by the community. It becomes a pocket guide that can be linked to additional events, destinations, active routes and much more.

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FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enterprise Ireland • Wicklow Co Co Community Awards Scheme
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Town Team

6 Town Centre Green Space Network

Project Overview & Objectives

Introduction

Green spaces or Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) is an essential component of healthy, thriving communities and ecosystems. GBI is typically a term used to describe the network of natural and semi-natural spaces and corridors in a given area. These might include open spaces such as parks and gardens but also allotments, woodlands, fields, hedges, lakes, ponds, playing fields, wetlands, as well as footpaths, cycle routes and watercourses.

Although Blessington is blessed by its picturesque location close to Blessington Lake and the Wicklow Mountains to the east and the Kildare uplands to the west, the town centre environment can feel urban in contrast. Where there are street trees along Main Street, this improves the character to such an extent that it lessens the prominence of vehicles and congestion.

Creation of a stronger Town Centre Green Space Network would better support active lifestyles, improve health and well-being, enhance biodiversity and generate greater climate resilience. Connectivity between green space assets is key to improving access to green space for all.

A Town Centre Green Space Network for Blessington should seek to plan for new urban greening, optimise the performance of existing green space and also improving connectivity to green assets within the wider area.

Integration of the E:Greenway which will connect Blessington Lake with Main Street is an opportunity to retrofit GBI elements, such as rain gardens, street trees and wildflower verges. In this way, GBI becomes a wayfinding tool.

Objectives

This Project would achieve the following objectives of the Blessington TCF Plan:



Accessibility



Urban Realm



Community



Economy



Natural Environment

Collaboration and Communication

A focused discussion with the Town Team highlighted the importance of access to green space and local GBI assets such as Glen Ding Wood which incorporates a 3.5km circular walking trail. A new walking trail through Blessington Demesne has recently been introduced, to better connect the BIRR to the wood and deer park

A new public park is also in the process of construction as part of the Sorrel Wood residential development, on an area of land where Downshire House once stood. The park is being designed and constructed by a private developer.

There were a number of potential projects identified through the CTCHC Phase 2 including:

- Enhance existing green spaces and biodiversity
- Develop a park network
- MUGA
- Street trees
- Develop drainage and water strategy.



An existing example of amenity space along Blessington's Main Street. The site supports mature trees and mown grass.

COST	■ ■ □ □
TIMEFRAME	■ ■ ■ □
IMPACT	■ ■ ■ ■
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wicklow Co Co Community Awards Scheme • LEADER • DRCD RRDF
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Wicklow Co Co Town Team

Recommendations

The Town Centre Green Space Network should seek to enhance the ecosystem services afforded by green space assets and provide for more urban greening.

Existing green spaces, generally

All green space and amenity open space within Blessington is recommended for:

- **audit**, in terms of understanding the existing quantum, function, character and condition of green space and
- **enhancement**, in terms of improving its biodiversity, amenity, recreation and drainage value. Maintenance and management regimes will likely require changes to reflect this.
- **enhancement** in terms of connecting sites, and providing walking routes from residential areas into the town centre.

Existing town centre green spaces

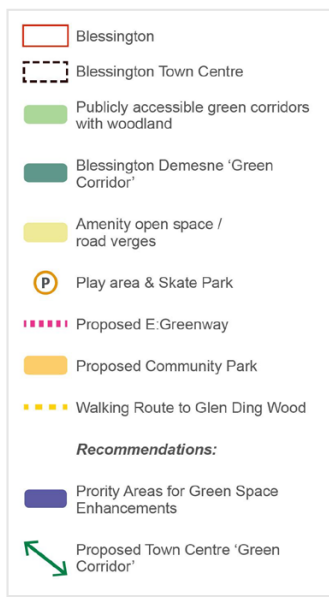
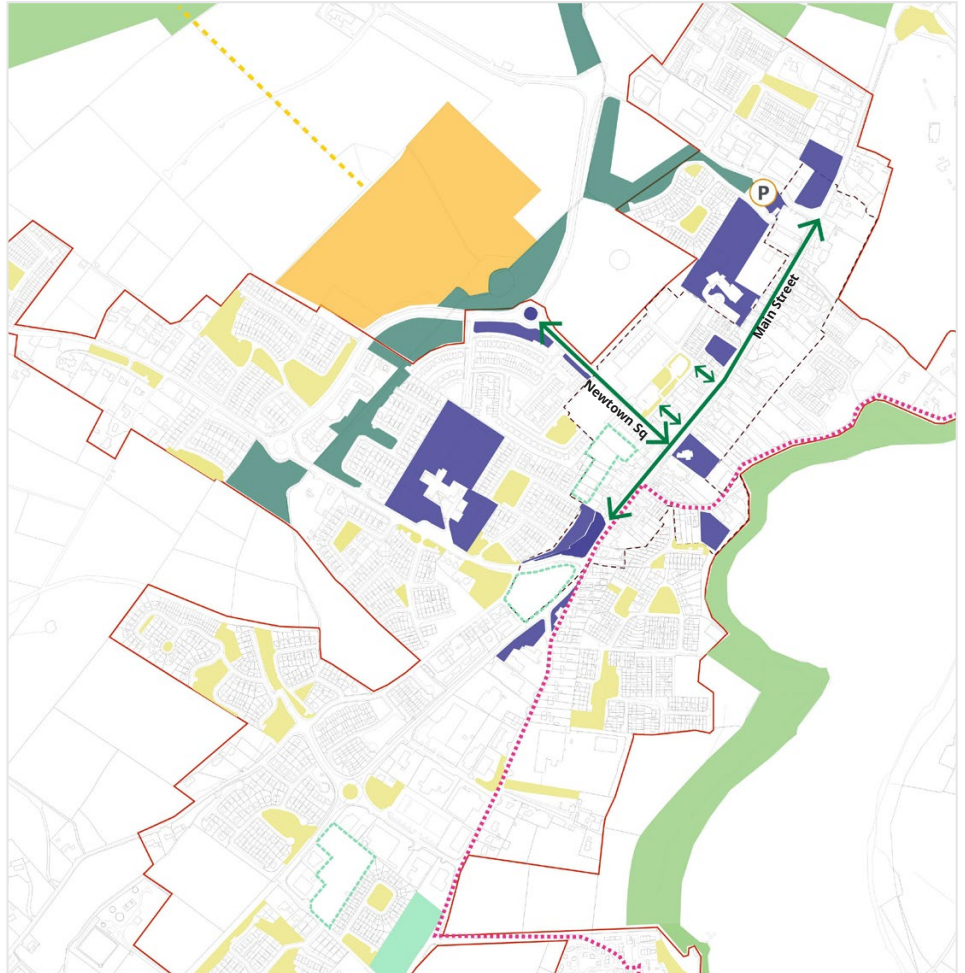
Key sites within the town centre are recommended to be prioritised for improvements. These comprise:

- School grounds
- Church grounds
- Parks and play areas
- Amenity open space and road verges close to key town centre routes.

Prioritising these sites will reinforce a 'Green Corridor' for the town centre which will create a more pleasant people-centred experience.

This corridor could comprise:

- Wildflower verges and areas managed to support birds, butterflies and insects
- Passive, sensory spaces with seating
- Spaces with incidental play equipment, to encourage 'play on the way'
- Formal play equipment, such as MUGAs
- Food growing areas to encourage intergenerational socialising
- Tree planting to increase carbon storage and provide shade during summer months
- Swales or rain gardens to support sustainable drainage and make Blessington more resilient to flooding, and
- Sheltered spaces to encourage use of the space with it, natural surveillance.



Potential green corridor for the town centre comprising Priority Areas for Green Space Enhancements

Strengthening the network

Planning for more urban greening, along key town centre routes - such as street trees, rain gardens, green roofs and wildflower areas - will create a more robust Green infrastructure network which enables habitat corridors and accentuates walking and cycling routes.

Green infrastructure is of particular importance with a view to better connecting the proposed E:Greenway to the retail heart of Blessington.

Planning for more town centre green spaces, such as the proposed concept for a linear park connecting Market Square to Dunnes (further information in Projects 3 and 4), will further strengthen and add value to the network.



- Proposed street trees to increase the quantum and variety in the town centre
- Corridors of planting and wildflower seeding for wildlife and sustainable water management
- 'On the way' play features to provide community amenity
- Sheltered and seating spaces for community amenity

Indicative plan outlining the creation of a linear park, better connecting the historic Market Square with the Town Centre development area to the rear.

Clanbrassil Street and St Nicholas Quarter, Dundalk

Infusing urban environments with green spaces is vital to ensuring natural habitats are well connected and that our towns and cities are climate resilient.

Clanbrassil Street was once located on the main vehicular route between Dublin and Belfast and was a hard, engineered space designed for large vehicles. The multi-disciplinary team sought to enhance the public realm without compromising the functionality of the street space.

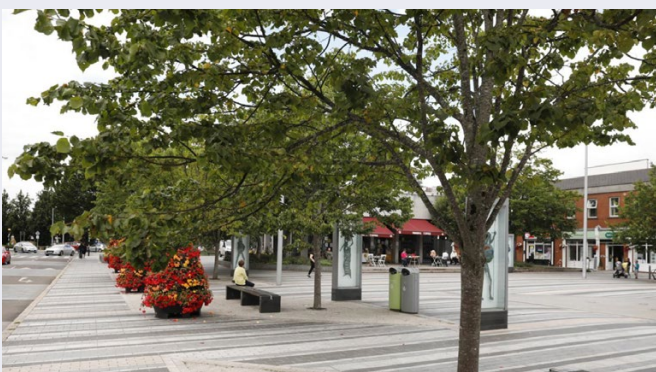
This project demonstrates how good placemaking can transform a hollowed out town centre into a living, breathing, sustainable public domain, promoting the health and well being of the local community.

"The completed scheme has transformed the main spine of the town, as well as making it more attractive for investment, and increasing visitors to the town". Joan Martin, Chief Executive of Louth County Council

The pocket parks and green spaces can be used by pedestrians as mental refreshers on their daily trips around the city.



Connected urban green spaces in Dundalk



Urban shading provided by increased tree canopy in Dundalk

Don't Mow, Let it Grow, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area

Don't Mow, Let it Grow is a project which hopes to make small changes in the management of selected public grassland sites to offer greater biodiversity benefits and increased biodiversity connectivity.

This is a three year partnership project between Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (CCGBC), Transport NI and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) which has been funded by Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Landfill Communities Fund (LCF).

The project focuses on the conservation of semi-natural grassland, specifically the management of road verges and amenity grasslands and the development of an online practical management toolkit to ensure long-term establishment.

There are now 19 trial DfI Roads verges and 17 trial amenity sites spread across the Borough, equating to over 11Ha of Council land now being managed as meadow for the benefit of the local community and visitors, as well as native wildflowers and pollinators. Traditional meadow management includes cutting once a year and where possible removing the cuttings. This has considerably reduced maintenance regimes.



Example of a Don't Mow Let it Grow verge with signage



Don't Mow Let it Grow roundabout in Ennis, Co. Clare

7 Supporting Local Business

Project Overview & Objectives

Introduction

The 2016 census indicates that 61.5% of Blessington's population is 'in work'. 1,212 travel into Dublin and its suburbs for work whilst the employment offer in the town is predominantly related to the commercial and trade sector with professional services featuring as the second largest employer.

Blessington's commercial sector largely features its retail service, which it provides to a wide rural catchment. There are a series of convenience shops including Dunnes Stores, Kenny's SuperValu and Aldi. Comparison stores are offered across main street and the Dunnes Store retail unit.

Importantly, 81% of businesses within the town centre are independent and 9% are start-ups. Whilst the quantum of vacant units within the town centre is low, ensuring Blessington's businesses continue to thrive is a key objective of the Town Centre First Plan.

Businesses could be supported through the following identified opportunities:

- Digital improvements to the town centre, such as provision of town centre WiFi
- Reducing congestion and parking mis-management in the town
- Creation of flexibly designed pedestrian priority public realm spaces to increase footfall and provide external spaces for business use
- Providing trading spaces for local food and craft markets.

Such improvements will attract further independent retail businesses, alongside active provision for business start-up support, reduced business rates and use of vacant properties on a temporary basis.



Installing Town Centre WiFi alongside introducing SMART public realm features will encourage greater participation and use of the town centre.

Objectives

This Project would achieve the following objectives of the Blessington TCF Plan:



Urban Realm



Community



Economy

Collaboration and Communication

There were a number of potential projects identified through the CTCHC Phase 2 including:

- Promoting evening activities
- Local food and craft markets and trading
- Encourage and attract independent retail
- Temporary use of vacant properties
- Town WiFi.

Residents' surveys indicated that there was a lack of activities and reasons to come into Blessington. There was also a notable desire to expand the retail and service offering in the town. In particular, there is a desire for an additional bank and a wider variety of restaurants.

For businesses, a lack of parking spaces was cited as the biggest issue in Blessington, followed closely by a lack of shops and services and the prevalence of traffic. A lack of banking facilities was also cited as an issue for some respondents. High rates, anti-social behaviour and a lack of accommodation for tourists visiting the town were also cited as issues.

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IMPACT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FUNDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WiFi4EU Funding • RRDF • Town and Village Renewal Scheme 			
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Wicklow CC			



Creation of public realm spaces which future proof for market trading and events

Flexibly designed Public Realm

Proposed areas of public realm should include provision for future proofing the town, for the purposes of:

- Event planning
- Providing greater external spaces for businesses
- Market trading
- Increased use by a growing community.

The provision of a sheltered space, whether temporary or permanent, will facilitate year round usage. Installing electrical pop-ups within these spaces will provide a much needed power supply for future events. Town WiFi and undergrounding of electrical wires are also key contributors to this project.

Spaces should also provide fixed seating for general community use.



Public realm space in Clifden, Co Galway which supports fixed seating areas, spill out space for businesses and spaces for other flexible uses.

WiFi4EU Funding Stream

The Irish government has shown its continuous support for WiFi4EU, an European Commission initiative which promotes free access to Wi-Fi connectivity for citizens in public spaces throughout Europe.

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) provides match funding, thereby doubling the value of the EUR 15,000 voucher granted to Irish WiFi4EU beneficiaries.

The matching funding has allowed county councils to install a larger number of hotspots and broaden the project's impact in terms of connectivity and opportunities for the population.

According to the Broadband Officer of Offaly County Council, "connectivity is key in this era of digitalisation and the introduction of [WiFi4EU] will strengthen Offaly's reputation as a forward thinking and digitally inclusive urban and rural landscape, which strongly promotes access to on-line services and information across the County".

The WiFi4EU voucher provides a fixed amount of funding of EUR 15,000 per municipality. Municipalities receiving vouchers will select the 'centres of public life' where the WiFi4EU hotspots (wireless access points) will be installed. The WiFi4EU vouchers may also be used to partially fund a project of higher value.

The voucher may serve to purchase new equipment or upgrade old material and replace it with most recent and best available equipment on the market. The beneficiaries will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis, while ensuring that all Member States can benefit from a minimum amount of vouchers.

8 Improving the Accommodation offer

Project Overview & Objectives

The absence of accommodation in Blessington is a pronounced issue for the local community. The town's existing tourism potential - due to its proximity to the Wicklow Mountains National Park - is being overlooked for this reason. With the anticipated future extension of the Greenway, due consideration needs to be given for providing a range of town centre accommodation.

Objectives

This Project would achieve the following objectives of the Blessington TCF Plan:



Accessibility



Urban Realm



Economy

Additional visitor accommodation could be introduced in Blessington via a number of methods:

- new hotel development within the town, prioritising use of existing vacant units, or vacant land
- the development of a campsite and allocated RV parking with hook-ups, close to Blessington Lake. This would address demand and provide visitors with an affordable and convenient place to stay while exploring the area.
- the development of glamping areas to cater for holiday lets, close to Blessington Lake
- town centre first floor holiday lets.

Private investment will likely be required to create new accommodation. Viability for such enterprises will increase once the full potential of the E:Greenway is realised.

Collaboration and Communication

Business owners' surveys highlighted a lack of accommodation for tourists visiting the town.

Feedback during public consultation again highlighted the lack of accommodation for tourists as a major issue for Blessington, particularly given the anticipated 300,000 tourists per annum growth in visitor which is anticipated with the extension of the Blessington Greenway.

COST	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
TIMEFRAME	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
IMPACT	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
FUNDING	• Private Developer led
PROJECT RESPONSIBILITY	Wicklow Co Co



The prominently location, and vacant, former Downshire Hotel occupies a prime town centre site with generous backlands.

A Revitalised Downshire Hotel

A Vision

The Downshire Hotel is a landmark town centre building built around 1820 as a house and latterly used as a hotel and art gallery. It is both on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage and a Protected Structure. It has been empty for some years, but is known to feature 27 bedrooms, a restaurant with capacity for 80 covers, a large function room capacity alongside secure off street parking and extensive lawned gardens.

The Downshire is located on a long L-shaped plot and has a double frontage along Main Street to the front and Kilbride Road to the rear, which is the proposed route for the proposed E:Greenway.

Due to the existing infrastructure in place, and the extensive grounds to the rear, it is feasible for the site to diversity its existing formal hotel offer into a multi-user accommodation site, also facilitating RV parking, camping and/or glamping.

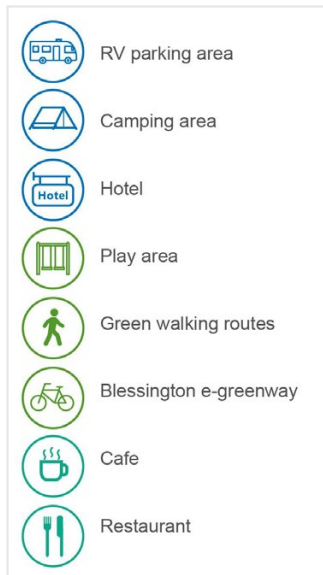
The site has enormous potential to better connect the town centre with the E:Greenway and Blessington Lake beyond. Safe public access routes could be provided along the south western boundary of the property and through the grounds connecting to Kilbride Road. Such connections are pivotal to ensure footfall from the Greenway into the town.

Recommendations

- Suitable land use comprises hospitality and accommodation, with agreed public access to certain areas.
- Ensuring an appropriate architectural response to mitigate any potential negative impact on the Protected Structure or its setting.
- Retention of high quality architectural features to convey sense of place.
- Providing a more direct access route which connects the E:Greenway and Blessington Lake to Main Street.
- Provision of an active frontage along both Main Street and Kilbride Road.
- Integration of Green infrastructure to ensure the site acts as a green corridor between Blessington Lake and the town centre.



Indicative plan outlining the potential multi-user accommodation potential of the former Downshire Hotel site.





Aerial view of Blarney Caravan and Camping Park



Caravan pitches at Blarney Caravan and Camping Park

Blarney Caravan and Camping Park, Cobh, Cork

The Blarney Caravan and Camping Park is located eight kilometres from Cork city and three from Blarney village. It is surrounded by green space and facilities such as the 18 hole pitch and putt. It is conveniently located close to local amenities (with a regular bus service from Cork City to Blarney Village) but it's secluded and peaceful enough to feel that you're in the middle of the countryside.

The Park offers hard standing and grass caravan and motorhome pitches including 2 dedicated disabled access pitches, and a separate camping area.

There are a number of destinations close to the site including Blarney Castle and Gardens and Ballyhass Aqua Park. The site is also the perfect base for those looking to explore the Southwest Coast of Ireland, including The Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East.



The communal Lodge at Lough Mardal nestled into the landscape



The Skydome yurts at Lough Mardal surrounded by natural bogland

Lough Mardal Lodge, Donegal

Perfectly located for outdoor adventure in Ireland's north west, Lough Mardal Lodge offers a sustainable glamping and eco lodge accommodation adjacent the stunning Lough Mardal near Donegal. It is located on the Wild Atlantic Way, 15 minutes from two beautiful beaches, remote and tranquil yet accessible.

The lodge is the central communal building and has been constructed from sustainable materials including locally sourced roundwood timber, straw bales, lime and cob with a green roof. The overall effect is a building embedded within the sensitive landscape.

A number of luxury skydome yurts and a shepherd's hut compliment the accommodation offer, all focused on the surrounding landscape offering wonderful views of the surrounding bogland, lake mountains and forestry.

Delivery Plan



Delivery Plan

Introduction

Implementing the Blessington Town Centre First Plan is an evolving and discursive process which will continue long after the TCF Plan is adopted. It is intended to be a flexible and adaptive document, to be reviewed regularly against up-to-date insights into funding opportunities, landowner opportunities and the demands of the market. Ensuring the plan continues to align with the hopes and aspirations of the community in Blessington is vital and this will be overseen by the Blessington Town Team.

The Delivery Plan is organised into the following sections:

- Governance
- Funding Mechanisms
- Planning Appraisal.

Governance

As set out in the Town Centre First policy, the delivery of projects will be carried out by the Town Team in collaboration with the Local Authority and others as required. The following roles and relationships are key in the implementation of the TCF Plan:

Town Regeneration Officer (WCC)

The presence of a dedicated WCC Town Regeneration Officer focused on Blessington will strengthen the relationship the town and its community has with the local authority. This will lead to stronger collaboration on the projects and decisions necessary to rejuvenate the town.

Blessington Town Team

The Town Team will have a continuous role in co-ordinating and overseeing delivery of projects, communicating with stakeholders and reviewing the TCF plan over time so that they retain ownership of the TCF process.

The Town Regeneration Officer will support the ongoing work of Town Teams, ensuring development and delivery on the TCF Plan alongside the Town champion.

Creating a Town Team Action Plan

It is recommended that the Town Team sets out an Action Plan for how the TCF Plan should ideally be implemented, looking at:

- Evaluation of the plan as a strategic whole ideally on an annual basis in order to understand which opportunities form the focus for each particular year.
- The creation of Working Groups looking at specific opportunities within the TCF Plan. Membership of Working Groups should be aligned with the diverse sectors, backgrounds and experience each team member can offer the particular project in question.
- The appropriate mechanisms for disseminating information into the wider community, such as through the creation of a website, using social media platforms, sharing meeting minutes.
- Setting a timeframe for the monitoring of the vision, objectives and priority opportunities within the TCF Plan, in conjunction with the Town Regeneration Officer.
- On-going monitoring funding streams and relevance to the plan.

Phasing

The progression of the projects within the TCF Plan will require due consideration of phasing, in relation to:

- What projects are considered enabling works (for example, transport improvements, and undergrounding of electrical wires)
- understanding the processes within and between projects (for example, a UDF would be developed as a pre-cursor to any public realm development).

Phasing of development should also consider the timeframe for funding opportunities, in order to maximise the effectiveness of the TCF Plan.

Funding Mechanisms

An overview of current funding opportunities that projects promoted through the TCF process may be eligible for are set out below.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF)

The RRDF is a funding programme that is investing €1 billion in rural Ireland up to 2027. This fund is aimed at:

- Supporting job creation in rural areas
- Addressing de-population of rural communities
- Supporting improvements in towns and villages.

RRDF funding is available for towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000 and is awarded through a competitive bid process, proposals are invited from Local Authorities and other locally/regionally based organisations such as Local Development Companies.

Croí Cónaithe (CC)

A grant of up to a maximum of €50,000 (inclusive of VAT) for:

- the refurbishment of vacant properties for occupation as a principal private residence, and
- for properties which will be made available for rent.

This includes the conversion of properties which have not been used previously for residential landuse, subject to acquiring appropriate planning consents.

A maximum top-up grant amount of up to €20,000 is available where the property is confirmed by the applicant to be derelict (i.e. structurally unsound and dangerous) or if the property is already on the local authority's Derelict Sites Register.

Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS)

The scheme is targeted at two categories:

- Category 1: Towns and villages up to 5,000 people.
- Category 2: Town with a population of 5,001 to 10,000 people (suited to Blessington.)

A key measure is supporting Our Rural Futures and Town Centre First Policy. The 2023 TVRS is designed to support the revitalisation of rural Ireland through a renewed focus on town centre economic and social recovery and regeneration. This will be achieved through projects focusing on town centre regeneration, enhancing our streetscapes and bringing vacant and derelict buildings back into use as community multi-purpose spaces through refurbishment and renovation.

This scheme is a competitive process with local authorities invited to submit application forms to the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). There are two types of applications Local Authorities:

- Building Acquisition Measure
- Main TVRS Measure.

LEADER Community Led Local Development (CCLD)

The LEADER Initiative was established by the European Commission in 1991. It was designed to aid the development of sustainable rural communities following the reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy. LEADER promotes a 'bottom-up' approach to rural development, with the implementation of business plans and decisions on funding being made at a national level on projects.

The LEADER programme is administered at a local level by 29 local action groups. Sligo Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) is the Local Action Group for delivery of the LEADER programme in Sligo.

The LEADER Programme accepts applications based on projects which improve:

- Rural Tourism
- Enterprise development
- Broadband.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS)

This scheme provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure. It also provides support for the necessary repair, maintenance, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in rural areas across Ireland. It provides funding for: development, extensions and repair of trails, walkways, cycleways and blueways improved access to outdoor leisure or recreational facilities development of outdoor recreational infrastructure.

Other funding opportunities

The following list outlines other grant schemes which have the potential to support the regeneration of Blessington:

- Creative Ireland Grant Scheme (CIGS)
- Heritage Council Community Heritage Fund (HCCHF)
- Dept. of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Community Monuments Fund (CMF)
- Dept. of Department of Rural and Community Development Community Centre Investment Fund (CCIF)
- SEAI Community and Business Grants (SEAI)
- Local Authority Community Grants
- Fáilte Ireland Small Grants Scheme (FAILTE IRE)
- NTA Active Travel Grants Programme (NTA)
- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)
- Historic Towns Initiative (HTI)
- Fáilte Ireland 'Destination Towns' Initiative (DT)
- Sustainable Mobility Investment Programme (SMIP)
- Historic Structures Fund (HSF)
- Built Heritage Capital Grant (BHCG)
- Funding under the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways (SFDNRG).

Planning Appraisal

Project	Description	Planning Policy Alignment	Compliance with Planning Policy	Compliance with Town Centre First Plan Objectives
Opportunity 1: Strategic Transport Assessment				
Strategic Transport Assessment	Possible measures to emerge from the assessment include pedestrian facilities such as additional seating and crossing points in the short and medium term. In the long term, there may be pedestrianisation of Market Square and other public realm improvements as well as the addition of bicycle parking and segregated cycle facilities. There will be new bus stops with an increase in bus frequency in the longer term. In the medium term, there is an aim of reallocating on street parking to the existing multi-storey car park. Electric vehicle charging points and time-based parking could be introduced within 3 years. In the short term, there is an aim of completing the Inner Relief Road. It may also include the introduction of traffic calming measures within the town and a reduction of the speed limit to 30km/hr.	<p>NPF: NPO 4, NPO 6, NPO 27</p> <p>RSES: RPO 7.42, RPO 7.7, RPO 8.1, RPO 8.2, RPO 8.3, RPO 9.10</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 12.1, CPO 12.2, CPO 12.3, CPO 12.6, CPO 12.7, CPO 12.11, CPO 12.12, CPO 12.13, CPO 12.14, CPO 12.17, CPO 12.18, CPO 12.21, CPO 12.44</p>	The Strategic Transport Assessment and emerging projects actively enhance active travel and public transport thereby encouraging a modal shift and reducing private car travel and the associated emissions. The reallocation of on-street parking will lead to an improved streetscape that creates an attractive and liveable town that promotes a high-quality of life.	<p>Accessibility: This project can actively enhance the mobility and connectivity of the town through various measures including new pedestrian crossing points and cycles lanes.</p> <p>Urban Realm: The reallocation of on-street parking along with the public realm enhancements such as additional seating will lead to a greater sense of place and vibrancy within the town centre.</p> <p>Community: The project can contribute to the creation of an attractive town centre that is an active and people focused place fostering a vibrant and inclusive community.</p> <p>Economy: Improved mobility can support the sustainable economic growth of the town by attracting new businesses and increasing pedestrian footfall.</p>

Project	Description	Planning Policy Alignment	Compliance with Planning Policy	Compliance with Town Centre First Plan Objectives
Opportunity 1: Strategic Transport Assessment				
Strategic Transport Assessment	Possible measures to emerge from the assessment include pedestrian facilities such as additional seating and crossing points in the short and medium term. In the long term, there may be pedestrianisation of Market Square and other public realm improvements as well as the addition of bicycle parking and segregated cycle facilities. There will be new bus stops with an increase in bus frequency in the longer term. In the medium term, there is an aim of reallocating on street parking to the existing multi-storey car park. Electric vehicle charging points and time-based parking could be introduced within 3 years. In the short term, there is an aim of completing the Inner Relief Road. It may also include the introduction of traffic calming measures within the town and a reduction of the speed limit to 30km/hr.	<p>NPF: NPO 4, NPO 6, NPO 27</p> <p>RSES: RPO 7.42, RPO 7.7, RPO 8.1, RPO 8.2, RPO 8.3, RPO 9.10</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 12.1, CPO 12.2, CPO 12.3, CPO 12.6, CPO 12.7, CPO 12.11, CPO 12.12, CPO 12.13, CPO 12.14, CPO 12.17, CPO 12.18, CPO 12.21, CPO 12.44</p>	The Strategic Transport Assessment and emerging projects actively enhance active travel and public transport thereby encouraging a modal shift and reducing private car travel and the associated emissions. The reallocation of on-street parking will lead to an improved streetscape that creates an attractive and liveable town that promotes a high-quality of life.	<p>Accessibility: This project can actively enhance the mobility and connectivity of the town through various measures including new pedestrian crossing points and cycles lanes.</p> <p>Urban Realm: The reallocation of on-street parking along with the public realm enhancements such as additional seating will lead to a greater sense of place and vibrancy within the town centre.</p> <p>Community: The project can contribute to the creation of an attractive town centre that is an active and people focused place fostering a vibrant and inclusive community.</p> <p>Economy: Improved mobility can support the sustainable economic growth of the town by attracting new businesses and increasing pedestrian footfall.</p>

Project	Description	Planning Policy Alignment	Compliance with Planning Policy	Compliance with Town Centre First Plan Objectives
Opportunity 2: Urban Design Framework Study				
Urban Design Framework	<p>The UDF should establish clear typologies for the design of streets and spaces based on a hierarchy. For Blessington, this may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main Street, as the key town centre route and focus of retail activity in the town. • Newtown Square, as a secondary route connecting to the Town Centre Development. • The Lanes, a potential new typology reflecting the desire to provide greater permeability for walkers and wheelers and improve character. 	<p>NPF: NPO 4, NPO 6, NPO 18a</p> <p>RSES: RPO 6.12, RPO 6.13, RPO 6.14</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 5.1, CPO 5.2, CPO 5.4, CPO 5.9, CPO 5.16, 5.21, CPO 5.21, CPO 5.22, CPO 5.23, CPO 10.8, CPO 10.9</p>	<p>An Urban Design Framework will introduce renewed viability and vibrancy to the town centre. By protecting Main Street as the retail core, there will be a focus on reducing vacancy and ensuring adequate footfall where the greatest number of businesses can benefit. In line with policy, the proposed project can enhance permeability and connectivity through the town leading to an attractive and vibrant public realm.</p>	<p>Accessibility: Creating typologies and a hierarchy of streets will improve the permeability and connectivity of the town and lead to a better built environment for pedestrians and cyclists.</p> <p>Urban Realm: Clear typologies to the streets can ease wayfinding and create a vibrant public realm that will support the local economy and create a sense of pride in the town.</p> <p>Community: Streets that encourage a greater level of activity can foster a sense of community and lead to improved community cohesion and contribute towards a sense of place.</p> <p>Economy: Active streets can lead to greater footfall, particularly within the retail core, and in this manner, better support local businesses.</p> <p>Natural Environment: With the emphasis on creating a people-focused place, there is an associated benefit for climate action through emission reduction.</p>

Project	Description	Planning Policy Alignment	Compliance with Planning Policy	Compliance with Town Centre First Plan Objectives
Opportunity 3: Placemaking Projects				
Market Square Public Realm Enhancements	This project aims to create a high-quality public space in the town centre – including through reallocating space, tree planting, additional lighting and public seating. There is a need to maximise space in the town centre in a way that best supports the local community and businesses.	<p>NPF: NPO 4, NPO 6, NPO 7, NPO 14, NPO 18a, NPO 28</p> <p>RSES: RPO 6.12, RPO 6.13, RPO 9.10, RPO 9.12</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 5.2, CPO 5.7, CPO 5.9, CPO 5.16, CPO 5.19, CPO 5.23</p>	Public realm improvements to Market Square can create a key destination within the town centre. This positively achieves healthy place-making and the development of sustainable communities. It will be important to ensure the principles of universal design form a central concern in any public realm improvements, including those to Market Square.	<p>Accessibility: Public realm improvements in the town centre can encourage cars to slow down and can prioritise the movement of people and cyclists and make the town centre more attractive.</p> <p>Urban Realm: Changes to the streetscape including additional trees and seating can improve the look and feel of Blessington and encourage more people to spend time in the town.</p> <p>Community: Enhancements to the public realm can lead to a greater sense of pride in the town and lead to stronger community cohesion and inclusion.</p> <p>Economy: Creating a more vibrant public realm can support local businesses and the wider economy by encouraging greater footfall around the prominent retail areas of the town.</p> <p>Natural Environment: Additional trees and planting can enhance the natural environment. The introduction of green infrastructure may also aid</p>

Project	Description	Planning Policy Alignment	Compliance with Planning Policy	Compliance with Town Centre First Plan Objectives
				with surface water drainage and flood relief measures.
Shop Frontage Strategy	The Strategy may include improvements through painting shopfronts, upgrading or restoring shopfronts as necessary and decluttering shopfronts including the removal of unnecessary signage and wires. Entrances will be enhanced by planting and installing canopies and street furniture.	<p>NPF: NPO 4, NPO 6, NPO 7, NPO 14, NPO 16, NPO 17</p> <p>RSES: RPO 6.12, RPO 6.13, RPO 6.14</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 5.4, CPO 5.9, CPO 5.23, CPO 8.10, CPO 8.16, CPO 8.18, CPO 9.12, CPO 10.19</p>	A Shop Frontage Strategy to improve the visual quality of the shop fronts can actively enhance the quality of the public realm and restore shop fronts to a manner more in line with the original, thereby, protecting and enhancing the architectural heritage of the streetscape.	<p>Urban Realm: The removal of unnecessary signage and clutter from shop fronts can visually improve the quality of the streetscape and the wider urban realm.</p> <p>Community: Converting historic shop fronts can reinforce the unique qualities of the town and provide a sense of place and historic connection.</p> <p>Economy: Restoring shop fronts to align with their historic built form can create a strong sense of identity and place that encourages people to shop local and support local businesses. A historic town centre intentionally brands the town and helps Blessington stand out from competing locations.</p>
Town Branding	The Town Branding Strategy aims to establish consistency across the town's suite of signage with the aim of decluttering, simplifying and conveying something uniquely Blessington. This would aid the town in creating a unique identity and sense of place.	<p>NPF: NPO 4, NPO 6, NPO 7, NPO 15, NPO 17, NPO 21, NPO 28</p> <p>RSES: RPO 6.12, RPO 6.13, RPO 6.14, RPO 6.21, RPO 9.24, RPO 9.27</p>	Town Branding is an effective form of place-making leading to a high-quality urban place while concurrently enhancing the built heritage of the town by ensuring a cohesive and integrated design across the public realm. This aligns with the strong emphasis on place-	<p>Urban Realm: A cohesive approach to town branding can greatly improve the visual amenities of Blessington leading to a greater sense of place.</p> <p>Community: Consistency across town branding and signage can foster a greater sense of community and pride in the town.</p>

Project	Description	Planning Policy Alignment	Compliance with Planning Policy	Compliance with Town Centre First Plan Objectives
		<p>WCDP: CPO 5.1, CPO 5.2, CPO 5.6, CPO 5.7, CPO 5.8, CPO 5.9, CPO 5.14, CPO 5.21, CPO 8.10, CPO 8.25</p>	<p>making and town centre renewal within the Wicklow County Development Plan.</p>	<p>Economy: Town branding is an important enabler in attracting new businesses to the town. It is also vital for tourism and putting Blessington ‘on the map’ which will have a long-term positive impact on the local economy.</p>
Opportunity 4: Activating the Town Centre				
<p>Activating the Town Centre – Improving Vacancy and Dereliction</p>	<p>This project provides the opportunity to redevelop and regenerate a number of sites within the town centre to enhance the vibrancy and viability of the town. A number of Opportunity Sites are included and grouped to demonstrate the desire for a cohesive design approach.</p>	<p>NPF: NPO 4, NPO 6, NPO 11, NPO 16, NPO 27, NPO 28</p> <p>RSES: RPO 3.2, ROP 3.3, RPO 6.12, RPO 6.14, RPO 9.14, RPO 9.30</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 4.3, CPO 4.5, CPO 4.9, CPO 5.1, CPO 5.7, CPO 5.8, CPO 5.9, CPO 5.17, CPO 5.18, CPO 8.10, CPO 8.13, CPO 8.14</p>	<p>The regeneration of appropriate sites in Blessington can ensure the creation of an attractive and liveable town. Regeneration of the town centre further recognises the importance of planning for mixed-use development and providing a variety of land uses including residential, retail and employment within walking distance of each other. This has the benefit of promoting active travel and a reduced reliance on private vehicles.</p>	<p>Accessibility: Providing mixed-use development in the town centre can encourage active travel and promote improved connectivity and mobility in the town.</p> <p>Urban Realm: The reuse and regeneration of vacant buildings can improve the public realm and make the town centre a more inviting place where people want to spend time.</p> <p>Community: Addressing vacancy in the town can instil a sense of pride and promote a sense of place among the local community.</p> <p>Economy: Regenerating town centre sites can further activate other economic activities and encourage members of the community to undertake retail activity in Blessington.</p>

Project	Description	Planning Policy Alignment	Compliance with Planning Policy	Compliance with Town Centre First Plan Objectives
				<p>Natural Environment: The appropriate reuse of existing buildings is a positive approach for the natural environment as it prevents the release of embodied carbon that would occur through demolition.</p>
Opportunity 5: Supporting Community Amenity				
Greenway Hub	<p>A Greenway Hub along the route of the proposed Greenway in close proximity to Blessington Town Centre can provide much needed amenity and recreational uses. The Hub would support those using the Greenway with facilities including toilets and washrooms, bicycle repair and a bicycle rental service. The Hub can also support a wider variety of community uses including play facilities and picnic areas.</p>	<p>NPF: NPO 5, NPO 6, NPO 18a, NPO 22, NPO 27, NPO 28, NPO 58, NPO 60</p> <p>RSES: RPO 6.1, RPO 6.21, RPO 9.14</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 5.1, CPO 5.2, CPO 5.6, CPO 5.7, CPO 5.8, CPO 5.9, CPO 5.12, CPO 9.2, CPO 11.1, CPO 11.3</p>	<p>A Greenway Hub would positively support the sustainable growth of Blessington and the development of the Greenway. A new recreational and community space can renew the vibrancy of the town. The project would further enable Blessington to develop as a key tourist destination by attracting users of the Greenway to the town.</p>	<p>Accessibility: A Greenway Hub in an appropriate location can improve the accessibility of Blessington, particularly for walkers and cyclists.</p> <p>Urban Realm: Improvements to the wider public realm will create a positive impression of the town and encourage visitors to spend time in Blessington.</p> <p>Community: The Hub can serve as a multi-functional space for a variety of community uses that can lead to stronger community cohesion and integration.</p> <p>Economy: By providing a facility for tourists and users of the Greenway, the Hub indirectly supports other local businesses and the economy. It is not recommended to include a café within the Hub to</p>

Project	Description	Planning Policy Alignment	Compliance with Planning Policy	Compliance with Town Centre First Plan Objectives
				<p>encourage continued interaction with the town centre.</p> <p>Natural Environment: The Hub provides the opportunity to better manage the area particularly with regard to sustainable water management. The use of photovoltaic panels would also enable an environmentally conscious approach to the project.</p>
Leisure Centre	<p>There is clear recognition of the community desire for a leisure centre. Design recommendations include the need for any future leisure centre to be easily accessible with adequate space for both car and bicycle parking. There should also be an emphasis on sustainable design solutions and the use of renewable energy sources. There is a need to find a suitable site to progress with this project.</p>	<p>NPF: NPO 4, NPO 26, NPO 30</p> <p>RSES: RPO 9.14, RPO 9.15</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 7.1, CPO 11.1, CPO 11.2, CPO 11.3</p>	<p>A leisure centre supports the development of strong community cohesion. The development of easily accessible recreational facilities supports a high quality of life and wellbeing among the community. A leisure centre in Blessington contributes to the creation of an attractive place where people can live, work and play.</p>	<p>Accessibility: A well connected, and easily accessible leisure centre can encourage people to walk and cycle to the facility. Locating community amenities in appropriate, well-connected places improves the overall accessibility and mobility of the town.</p> <p>Urban Realm: High quality design solutions for the development of a leisure centre can improve the wider public realm by ensuring there is active frontages to all facades and new planting associated with the development can better the urban realm while integrating the leisure centre into its setting.</p>

Project	Description	Planning Policy Alignment	Compliance with Planning Policy	Compliance with Town Centre First Plan Objectives
				<p>Community: A new leisure centre offering various recreational activities can promote community cohesion and integration as well as support wellbeing and a high-quality of life.</p> <p>Economy: A leisure centre can support the local economy by offering a place for the community to partake in recreational activities in the town. This can also have a positive multiplier effect on other businesses.</p>
My Town App	<p>The development of a 'My Town App' for Blessington will create a digital directory of local businesses, services and events. This includes information relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Library opening hours. • Theatre opening hours and showings. • The range of activities offered by community centres. • Activities offered by privately owned sports clubs. 	<p>NPF: NPO 4, NPO 14</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 5.1, CPO 5.2, CPO 5.16, CPO 11.1</p>	<p>The development of My Town App promotes the viability and vibrancy of Blessington Town Centre by showcasing the businesses and activities in the town. The App would further promote tourism in the town by enabling people to research various amenities prior to and during their visit.</p>	<p>Community: My Town App can have a positive impact on community wellbeing by providing clear and accurate information about the services and facilities in Blessington. This may have the benefit of members of the community staying in the town for various recreational and retail activities.</p> <p>Economy: With all necessary information in one place, people may be more likely to stay in the town to shop and socialise which can have a positive effect on the local economy.</p>
Community Energy Plan	<p>A Community Energy Plan would assist Blessington in achieving climate targets and would have a long-term</p>	<p>NPF: NPO 4, NPO 6, NPO 17, NPO 28, NPO 53, NPO</p>	<p>The introduction of a Community Energy Plan can positively contribute to the development of</p>	<p>Community: A focus on renewable energy generation can provide a clean, secure and</p>

Project	Description	Planning Policy Alignment	Compliance with Planning Policy	Compliance with Town Centre First Plan Objectives
	community and economic benefit as renewables become increasingly cost effective.	<p>55</p> <p>RSES: RPO 7.35, RPO 7.42, RPO 7.7</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 9.21, CPO 12.18, CPO 16.01, CPO 16.03, CPO 16.09, CPO 16.15</p>	renewable energy projects. This will support the broader renewable energy targets set at the national level and contribute towards a low carbon economy.	<p>affordable form of energy for Blessington Town. This can have a positive impact on the social and community development of the town.</p> <p>Economy: The development of renewable energy in Blessington will benefit the local economy by providing an affordable and secure form of energy. This will benefit local businesses and the wider community.</p> <p>Natural Environment: Renewable energy can have a positive impact on the natural environment by moving away from a reliance on fossil fuels and the associated emissions. The generation of renewable energy can help Blessington meet its climate change targets and have an overall benefit on the climate.</p>
Opportunity 6: Town Centre Green Space Network				
Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy	Blessington is located in a picturesque setting in close proximity to the Wicklow Mountains. This project aims to enhance the green infrastructure within the town itself to improve the character and natural environment. The project may include urban greening	<p>NPF: NPO 4, NPO 6, NPO 27, NPO 8</p> <p>RSES: RPO 3.7, RPO 7.7, RPO 7.23</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 5.16, CPO 5.18, CPO 5.19, CPO 9.12,</p>	The enhancement of green infrastructure can have a positive impact on Blessington's biodiversity and the wider ecosystem. Additional green spaces and green infrastructure can also assist in achieving climate	Accessibility: The use of natural assets including street trees and flowerbeds can create a gateway at the entry point to the town. This can encourage vehicles to slow down and have a positive impact on the pedestrian experience of

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	and improving the connectivity between existing green spaces.	CPO 17.1, CPO 17.16, CPO 18.1, CPO 18.2, CPO 18.5	change objectives by having an adaptation and mitigation value.	<p>Blessington’s urban environment.</p> <p>Urban Realm: Greening the urban environment including through the introduction of additional trees, rain gardens and wildflower verges can greatly improve the quality of the public realm.</p> <p>Community: Enhancing existing green spaces and providing additional green infrastructure can benefit community wellbeing and quality of life. It may also encourage people to spend more time outdoors, thereby promoting community interaction and cohesion.</p> <p>Economy: The promotion of Green Blessington as part of the Green Space Network can further attract visitors to the town which will have a benefit for local businesses and the economy.</p> <p>Natural Environment: Improving Blessington’s green network can have a direct benefit for biodiversity and local ecosystems. It can also positively impact the adaptation and mitigation of climate change.</p>

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Opportunity 7: Supporting Local Business				
Supporting Local Businesses	There is a need to support the existing businesses in Blessington with the aim of creating a thriving town centre which can attract new businesses and ensure the continued vibrancy and vitality of the town. This can be done through a variety of measures including through the provision of town WiFi, a new parking strategy to reduce congestion and enabling the use of public spaces for food and craft markets.	<p>NPF: NPO 4, NPO 5, NPO 6, NPO 11, NPO 15, NPO 16, NPO 18a, NPO 21, NPO 24</p> <p>RSES: RPO 3.5, RPO 6.1, RPO 6.14, RPO 9.14,</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 5.1, CPO 5.2, CPO 5.5, CPO 5.6, CPO 5.7, CPO 5.10, CPO 5.16, CPO 9.1, CPO 9.2, CPO 9.7, CPO 9.12</p>	Measures to support local businesses can support the continued viability of the town centre. The use of the public realm for events such as markets creates an attractive town centre and further supports local businesses and the wider economy of Blessington.	<p>Urban Realm: The use of the urban environment for various events can successfully activate the public realm and create a more attractive environment where people want to spend time.</p> <p>Community: The aim of attracting new businesses and activating the public realm can promote social development and community cohesion.</p> <p>Economy: The proposed measures can attract further independent businesses to the town, thereby increasing the variety of retail choice in Blessington. This has the added benefit of encouraging people to stay in Blessington for retail activity and supporting the local economy.</p>
Opportunity 8: Improving Accommodation Offer				
Spotlight on Downshire Hotel	There is a recognised need to provide a new accommodation offering in Blessington to support the tourism industry as well as the wider local community. Visitor accommodation could be introduced in a number of ways. The existing infrastructure at the Downshire Hotel makes it an	<p>NPF: NPO 5, NPO 11, NPO 16, NPO 22</p> <p>RSES: RPO 6.1, RPO 6.13, RPO 6.14, RPO 6.21</p> <p>WCDP: CPO 5.1, CPO 5.2, CPO 5.6, CPO 5.7, CPO 5.8,</p>	Revitalising and reusing the existing Downshire Hotel directly supports the development of the tourism sector and have a positive impact on the regeneration and vitality of the town centre.	Accessibility: Visitor accommodation in an appropriate location can improve the accessibility of the town centre by ensuring there is adequate pedestrian and cycle connectivity. This will have a positive impact on the overall pedestrian experience of the town.

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	<p>appropriate site for multi-user accommodation site, including RV parking, camping and/or glamping.</p>	<p>CPO 5.9, CPO 5.12, CPO 9.1, CPO 9.12, CPO 11.1, CPO 11.3</p>		<p>Urban Realm: The reuse of the Downshire Hotel as part of a new accommodation offering can improve the public realm by addressing existing vacancy and providing new active frontage within the town.</p> <p>Community: A new accommodation offering can provide a space for community and private events. This will have a positive impact on community cohesion as there can be a central place for community groups to gather.</p> <p>Economy: It is well recognised that Blessington is in need of a hotel or other accommodation offering such as a campsite in order to support the tourism sector. This is particularly important in the context of the Greenway. Accommodation within the town can have a multiplier effect on the other businesses in the town and support the local economy.</p>

Appendicies



Appendices

Appendix A Collaborative Town Centre Health Check Phase 1

Appendix B Collaborative Town Centre Health Check Phase 2

Appendix C Planning Policy information - Wicklow County Development Plan

Blessington

Town Centre First Plan

