

Newtown2050 + Newtown and District Forum

working together as

Team Newtownmountkennedy

This Submission in relation to Tourism Strategy as part of County Development Plan.

The Tourism section of the CDP sets out various strands that the plan draws from: National Policy Objectives, Strategic Marketing Plans, Regional Spatial & Economic Strategies.

These are then culminated in what are referred to as CPO, or County Policy Objectives.

As Newtownmountkennedy is considered a gateway town to the hills and sea we see it as being as an integral part of the county's tourism strategy and not referred to in the CPO's. For the following reasons we think Newtownmountkennedy should be included in the context of the County's Tourism Strategy:

- Newtownmountkennedy (NMK) has two major hotels in its centre and hinterland.
- The Parkview and Druids Glen Hotel and resort. Tourism Ireland is promoting bed nights as one of the key economic drivers in keeping visitors staying overnight in County Wicklow. We have them.
- Many hotels have been redeveloped for housing in Greystones. This should shift focus to supporting the existing hotels and facilities in NMK to survive and thrive. It appears NMK is being ignored in its potential.
- NMK also has many landmarks and trailways that will attract day visitors.
- Its shopping areas are limited and need further development. We suggest it is a perfect town to consider living above small business for studios, craft workshops and fabric based outlets. The town's transport access is good by bus and car and has potential for cycle and walking access. The main street would benefit from pedestrianisation.
- It is the main promoter for the Mountains to Sea Greenway as a major link between Sea and Hills.
- It is a major recipient of the RRDF fund and is presently its town centre re-designed and a planned park in its centre. It is the only town with a forest surrounding it, with an under-utilised Coillte HQ in its heartland.

- It is becoming a centre for craft food production and it would greatly benefit from assistance in developing its town core retail and its public realm strategy towards its inhabitants and visitors.
- Shaping the Mountains to the Sea Greenway as being a major attraction and conduit will enable a town centre to develop for the benefit of visitors and inhabitants alike.
- The General Objectives in Section 13 lay out that Tourism attractions be in existing village and towns. NMK is one such village.
- Rural tourism development is to be permitted where the attraction is dependent on space and rural locations.
- The activities mentioned above fit into NMK's character as a rural agricultural town with a strong commercial heart and underdeveloped resource at its core.

Since Covid 19 more and more people are looking for activities to the outdoor areas. We propose that the CDP supports NMK in becoming a centre for outdoor activity as it has the bed nights to support it and the natural landscape to support it.

We seek encouragement from the plan for surrounding farm business to diversify as mentioned into small activity and accommodation locations.

We also seek specific support for farms to be allowed to diversify in providing limited work location Hubs as part of this enterprise.

CPO11.7 specifically refers to the change of use/ conservation of existing buildings on farms to accommodate new tourism related use. We propose that the plan recognises the change in working habits and desire for persons in surrounding areas to work in their locality in purpose made remote working hubs of small volumes.

This suits small rural hubs located on small working farms that can offer an integrated work/ tourism experience. It also helps in the drive for people to reconnect with food production and place value on protection of biodiversity/ waterways etc.

Within CP11.17. Small farms are struggling to exist in an industrial farm landscape. They are encouraged to diversify into different areas by Teagasc. We propose that the CDP specifically encourages diversification into small tourism businesses within farms to allow remote working, broadband development and small accommodation pockets by glamping or other means for small farmers.

This will also encourage farmers to allow Greenways/ Blueways to use their land as they will see added benefit to such uses to their farm income.

Recent changes in Europe within CAP reform to support small farmers move away from large scale industrial farm development should be responded to.

Tourism is a force of good and bad. It can damage delicate ecosystems but also offer solutions to global problems. There are many options available to develop “Green Tourism” opportunities by supporting farms to diversify into tourism. The Wicklow Way is often criticised for not having enough of a support infrastructure in place. Rest stops, overnight accommodation along the trail, signage, bins and general information is lacking and the CDP needs to support and promote this opportunity to create new opportunities for existing rural businesses. There is a market for eco friendly, sustainable holidays which Wicklow should be leading the way in.

The Biodiversity crisis which we now find ourselves in is largely a result of our industrial and farming practices.

We ask that the CDP document help shape how tourism practices in Wicklow develop to protect biodiversity and incentivise tourism businesses to put protection of nature at the heart of their business. Most hotels and associated tourism businesses are now being audited to see how they impact the environment. This is being led by the consumer. Wicklow should position itself as the lead authority on this in Ireland.

We see that NMK is perfectly situated as a town to become a model of how to build sustainable tourism in Wicklow.

We have bed nights, a strong community, trails and attractions, a Green Jewel being planned in the heart of the town and a Mountains to Sea Greenway being placed within it.

As an overall comment, given the destruction of biodiversity within the county and the country overall, should not tourism related activities get additional encouragement assistance if they show they are enhancing our natural environment, either by their method of business or added on teaching of environmental considerations as part of their business model.

Sustainability and protection of the natural environment should be a key driver for management and development of all business in Wicklow.

Newtown 2050 have developed a study for a Green-Way to support a route between Greystones/ Kilcoole to Glendalough.

This study seeks not to identify specific routes but to develop sustainable solutions to Green-Way development. The potential benefit to biodiversity of such a route is immense if it is planned and designed with nature and human use in mind.

It proposes to make routes 6m wide to include large planted routes and surfaces to allow wildlife of all kinds to use the routes as well as walking and cycle ways between villages and towns.

This is especially important given the lack of safe, direct walking / cycling routes between NMK and Kilcoole for school and business access.

This proposed Green-Way is referred to in **CP11.37**. However, it is much more than an amenity route, it is critical infrastructure between villages and towns and should be described as such to help funding opportunities.

This area between Kilcoole and Glendalough is a hinterland sandwiched between the major urban areas of Bray-Stones and Wicklow/ Arklow.

It has potential to become an economically autonomous area with its own micro-economy. Within this we propose a special area designated to biodiversity growth, regenerative farming practices and tourism related farm activities underpinning **CPO.11.41** to be strongly encouraged.

Alongside this trail we especially support the Development of Horse Trails or inclusion of horses to use existing trails. This will both support the equestrians living in Wicklow and to develop a “Green Tourism” opportunity for existing rural businesses.

This part of Wicklow has an abundance of horse related activities in this specific area. Bridal routes and ways linking farms, horse studs, liveries and riding schools would be an added benefit to lowland and upland farm activities.

There is a lack of strategy in Wicklow Tourism plans and County Development Plan for helping to develop Equine based tourism and business in the county.

Given the experience of the last couple of years in regard to Covid 19 and the boom in outdoor related activity this has huge potential to be a much added value product for the tourism industry in Wicklow.