



30 August 2021

Administrative Officer,
Forward Planning,
Wicklow County Council,
Station Road,
Wicklow Town

Re: Draft Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028

Dear Sir/Madam,

I refer to the above. The Department of Education acknowledges the draft Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 and makes the following submission.

The Department notes that while the development plan is for the period 2022-2028 that the population and housing targets are provided up to 2031 in order to provide a robust and responsive long-term framework. The longer-term framework is of assistance to the Department in considering school requirements. The Department notes that the plan has to sit within the framework of the ESRI's 50:50 scenario which aligns with the NPF's 2040 population targets and settlement pattern. Population and housing targets are a key driver of school place requirements. The plan projects a population of 173,505 people in 2031. This represents an increase of 31,082 people over the 2016 population of 142,423. It is noted that over half of the increase is to be in the two key towns of Bray and Wicklow/Rathnew. A quarter of the increase is to take place in the self-sustaining growth towns of Arklow, Greystones/Delgany and Blessington. The remaining quarter is to be distributed across the self-sustaining towns and smaller settlements. Bray, as part of the Dublin MASP is to have a minimum population increase of 9,500 people in the period.

In terms of the overall education objectives, the Department welcomes the objectives to facilitate the provision of schools, namely:

- CPO 7.10 to zone educational sites and consult with the Department in that regard
- CPO 7.11 to ensure zoned sites are accessible
- CPO 7.12 Linkage of educational facilities and support for campus development
- CPO 7.14 where practicable, to cluster community/ education and open space facilities.

The Department is of the view that where this approach can be adopted it increases the return from investment of public funds in community/education and open space facilities as it facilitates sharing of facilities. If a community pitch can be provided beside a school, that pitch could be available for both the school during school hours and the community outside of school hours. Therefore, to reflect that possibility, the Department requests that the final sentence of CPO 14 be re-worded



to read “*in regard to provision of recreational facilities for schools, every effort should be made to co-ordinate the provision of these facilities with community facilities.*”

CPO 7.17 use of education facilities out of hours where possible

CPO 7.18 support for continuation and expansion of rural/village primary schools

The Department also requests the inclusion of an additional education objective concerning existing school sites and the capacity to extend them and/or intensify development of them. Given the NPF objectives around compact growth, the facility to expand existing schools and/or to otherwise maximise the use of existing school sites will be critical in the future, in order to meet emerging requirements in Co. Wicklow (and nationally). In that context, the Department suggests an additional education objective along the following line:

To ensure that existing and new school sites are protected for educational use and that lands adjacent to existing schools are protected for future educational use in order to allow for expansion of these schools, if required, subject to site suitability.

In order to strengthen the zoning provision on existing school sites and to aid future planning, the Department requests, if possible that all existing school sites are zoned and mapped on the Co Council's GIS system. In addition, if possible, could all future education sites be zoned and mapped. This would enable the Department to pick up the mapping and zoning on our own GIS system and aid us both in the school planning function.

In considering the implications of the Draft Plan for school accommodation requirements, the Department is cognisant of potentially differing scenarios where variances in factors such as household sizes, demographic profiles and housing delivery rates could significantly alter the future school accommodation requirements. The Department also took into account planned school capacity increases in considering the plan, as well as underlying demographic trends at both primary and post-primary levels which will serve to mitigate additional school place demand arising from the population increases that are envisaged in the Draft Plan. Based on all factors, a view has been formed concerning projected future requirements and how they can best be met at each settlement and commentary is provided in this regard. In the context of Table 3.6 (Settlement populations 2016-2031) it is also worth noting that in its assessment of population trends, the Department uses a number of parameters to determine future needs. Requirements at primary level are currently assessed on 11.5% of population and 25 students per classroom. Post-primary requirements are assessed 7.5% of population numbers.

Based on its analysis, this Department anticipates that some requirements for additional educational accommodation may emerge over the lifetime of the Plan, should the projected population increases materialize. In respect of the settlements identified in the Core Strategy Table 3.6, this Department has the following observations:

Key Town:

- **Bray:**



The population of Bray was 29,646 people in the 2016 Census. Bray is a key town in the metropolitan area and part of Bray extends into the administrative boundary of Dún Laoghaire Rathdown (DLR). The Co. Wicklow draft plan projects a population increase for Bray of some 10,779 people to a total of 40,425 by 2031 (an increase of c.36%). On the DLR side, the DLR plan anticipates that 50 ha of zoned residential lands in the Old Connaught area will deliver, on a phased basis and over a period of time, c. 2,000 residential units which, at an average household size, could yield a new population of 5,000 people in this area. The land in question is Tier 2, (not sufficiently serviced to support new development but has the potential to become fully serviced within the lifetime of the DRL plan, i.e. by 2028). From the Dept of Education's viewpoint in planning school provision, it is necessary to consider Bray as a whole. In this regard, it is understood that a joint urban plan is to be prepared for Bray and this would be necessary and welcome.

Bray is served by nine mainstream primary schools and seven (non-fee paying) post-primary schools. In addition, there are two special schools in Bray.

At primary level, taking into account the underlying demographic trends and the level of potential increase in school place requirements arising from the increased population, the Department anticipates a future requirement for at least one new primary school; that school to be located in the main area of future development, Fassaroe. There may also be increased requirements at some of the existing schools, depending on how population increase is distributed and on expansion capacity of existing schools.

At post-primary level, taking into account the current plans to increase capacity, it is anticipated that additional potential requirement arising from the projected population increase could be met by existing and planned facilities. Key in the current plans is the provision of a permanent building for a post-primary school established in 2016 and currently in interim accommodation. The Department is actively seeking a site for this school in order to cater for a 1,000 pupil school building. The site identification process is proving challenging. The assistance of Wicklow County Council would be much appreciated in identifying a suitable site within its administrative boundary (rather than the DLR boundary which is not as well located for the majority of the students that the school will serve).

- **Wicklow/Rathnew**

The population of Wicklow/Rathnew was 14,114 people in the 2016 Census. The draft plan projects that it will have increased by 5,356 people to a total of 19,470 by 2031 (an increase of c.38%).

Wicklow/Rathnew is served by six mainstream primary schools and four post-primary schools.

At primary level, taking into account the underlying demographic trends, it is anticipated that the existing schools (or expansion thereof) could meet the requirements arising from the increased population.



Key in the current plans is the provision of a permanent building for a post-primary school established in 2019 and currently in interim accommodation. Taking into account the planned provision of this school, it is anticipated that the requirements arising from the increased population in the draft plan can be met. The assistance of Wicklow County Council would be much appreciated in identifying a suitable site.

Self-sustaining Growth Town:

- **Arklow**

The population of Arklow was 13,224 people in the 2016 Census. The draft plan projects that it will have increased by 3,216 people to a total of 16,440 by 2031 (an increase of c. 24%).

Arklow is served by five mainstream primary schools and four post-primary schools.

Taking into account the underlying demographic trends, the Department anticipates that the level of potential increase in school place requirements arising from the increased population can be met by existing facilities (or expansion thereof)

- **Greystones/Delgany**

The population of Greystones/Delgany was 18,021 people in the 2016 Census. The draft plan projects that it will have increased by 3,609 people to a total of 21,630 by 2031 (an increase of approx. 20%).

Greystones/Delgany is served by eight mainstream primary schools and three post-primary schools. One of the post-primary schools was established recently (in 2020) and currently is in interim accommodation. The Department is engaged in a site acquisition process for a permanent building for this school.

Taking into account underlying demographic trends, the Department anticipates that the level of potential increase in school place requirements arising from the increased population can be met by existing facilities or expansion thereof or by the development of educational property in the ownership of the Minister in addition to planned new school development.

- **Blessington**

The population of Blessington was 5,234 people in the 2016 Census. The draft plan projects that it will have increased by 801 people to a total of 6,035 by 2031 (an increase of c. 15%). Given Blessington's location on the Wicklow / Kildare county boundar, the Department welcomes the commitment to ensure that any plans prepared for the town are undertaken in consultation with Kildare County Council to provide a strategy for the sustainable development of the town and its hinterland as a whole, irrespective of County borders.

Blessington is served by five mainstream primary schools and one post-primary school.



At primary level, taking into account underlying demographic trends, the Department anticipates that the level of potential increase in school place requirements arising from the increased population will be met by existing facilities.

At post-primary level, a relatively modest increase is anticipated in enrolment levels which could be met at the existing facility.

Self-sustaining Town:

- **Baltinglass**

The population of Baltinglass was 2,251 people in the 2016 Census. The draft plan projects that it will have increased by 474 people to a total of 2,725 by 2031 (an increase of c. 21%).

The town is served by two mainstream primary schools and one post-primary school.

Taking into account underlying demographic trends, the Department anticipates that the level of potential increase in school place requirements arising from the increased population can be met by existing facilities.

- **Kilcoole**

The population of Kilcoole was 4,244 people in the 2016 Census. The draft plan projects no substantive increase in population to 2031.

The town is served by one mainstream primary school and one post-primary school.

Taking into account underlying demographic trends and capital projects in the pipeline, the Department anticipates that the level of potential increase in school place requirements arising from the increased population can be met by existing facilities.

It also is planned (subject to planning permission) to re-locate St. Catherine's Special School from Newcastle to Kilcoole.

- **Enniskerry**

The population of Enniskerry was 1,877 people in the 2016 Census. The draft plan projects no substantive population change up to 2031.

The town is served by two mainstream primary schools. At post-primary level, Enniskerry is served by the schools in Bray.

The Department anticipates no increase in school place requirements for Enniskerry.



- **Newtownmountkennedy**

The population of Newtownmountkennedy was 3,552 people in the 2016 Census. The draft plan projects that it will have increased by 1,668 people to a total of 5,220 by 2031 (an increase of 46%).

The town is served by two mainstream primary schools.

At primary level, taking into account planned capital projects, it is anticipated that the existing schools will meet the requirements arising from the increased population.

At post-primary level, Newtownmountkennedy is located in the Kilcoole School Planning Area. An approved planned capacity increase is in the pipeline for this area and the Department anticipates that this will meet the requirements arising from the increased population in Newtownmountkennedy in the short to medium term.

- **Rathdrum**

The population of Rathdrum was 1,716 people in the 2016 Census. The draft plan projects that it will have increased by 764 people to a total of 2,480 by 2031 (an increase of 44%).

The town is served by three mainstream primary schools and one post-primary school.

At primary level, it is anticipated that the existing schools can meet requirements arising from the increased population.

At post-primary level, taking into account a planned extension to the existing school, it is anticipated that it will be able to meet requirements arising from the increased population.

Small towns and villages

No other educational requirements have been identified at any other settlements in Co. Wicklow

Conclusion

This Department has not identified any significant requirement for additional mainstream school place provision at any other settlement in Co Wicklow based on this draft plan. In terms of special schools, we have no immediate need identified to provide an additional special school in Co. Wicklow at present, but if a need arises the Department will get in touch with the Council. School accommodation requirements across the county will continue to be kept under review. In that regard, the Department welcomes the ongoing engagement with Wicklow County Council and will continue to work closely with the Council in relation to the provision of new schools and the



development of existing schools. The critical importance of the existing schools in meeting future needs is evidenced in the submission and therefore it is vital to protect their zoning and to have land buffers around them, wherever possible, in order to cater for future needs. The Department acknowledges the crucial importance of the ongoing work of the Council in ensuring sufficient and appropriate land is zoned for educational needs. The Department wishes to thank Wicklow County Council for the consideration given to the Department's submission to the Issues Paper in January 2020.

If you have any queries in respect of the above, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Hanlon
Statutory Plans
Forward Planning Section

