



**DRAFT**  
**BLESSINGTON**  
**LOCAL AREA PLAN 2025**  
**SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AUDIT**







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## PART 1 INTRODUCTION & POLICY CONTEXT

### 1.0 Introduction to the Blessington Local Area Plan Social Infrastructure Audit

Social infrastructure, community facilities and community development are fundamental elements in the creation of sustainable communities and supporting a good quality of life. Social Infrastructure relates to the provision of services and facilities which are essential for health, well-being and social development of a town / place. Social infrastructure facilities include, for example, education, health, care, leisure, recreation and culture.

Land use planning can contribute to the enhancement of social / community infrastructure and development through the following means:

1. Facilitating the delivery of community infrastructure through:
  - Identifying where possible community / social infrastructure deficiencies and needs of towns and villages.
  - The reservation of land for the development of new or enhanced social and community infrastructure in County and local development plans where a need for new facilities is identified;
  - Managing the expansion of residential development commensurate with the community infrastructure available;
  - Requiring the delivery of new community infrastructure as part of development proposals; and
  - Cooperating with other service providers in the delivery of new community infrastructure.
2. Facilitating improved physical access to community infrastructure and services through:
  - Promoting a development pattern that maximises the accessibility of social / community facilities infrastructure by public transport, cycle or foot;
  - Requiring all new facilities to be accessible and useable by those with special needs, including mobility or other impairments; and
  - Facilitating enhancement of communications infrastructure.
3. Facilitating the maintenance, restoration and upgrading of the cultural and natural heritage of communities, environmental upgrading and general actions to enhance the environmental, amenity and physical attributes of communities.

The function of a Social Infrastructure Audit (SIA) is to examine and analyse the availability and capacity of existing social / community infrastructure facilities, and to determine future requirements, and make recommendations based on anticipated settlement growth. The following SIA was prepared by Wicklow County Council (WCC) for the purposes of informing the Blessington Local Area Plan (LAP).

### 1.1 Methodology

The Blessington Social Infrastructure Audit will make use of a range of both quantitative and qualitative indicators in analysing the provision of social infrastructure in the Blessington area. The Audit will consist of three stages, as follows:

- Audit of Existing Facilities: Data gathering and direct consultation with service providers will enable the construction of a baseline level of social infrastructure provision. This can be compared with current known population figures to establish whether social infrastructure within the Blessington area adequately serves the **current** population.
- Demand Forecast Analysis: Applying the targeted population growth, as set out in the Core Strategy of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028, to the end of the Local Area Plan period will

allow a determination as to whether the capacity of current social infrastructure can accommodate this growth. Note that quantitative standards for the provision of social infrastructure may not exist in all cases. Furthermore, a range of figures for the target population may be required depending on the type of infrastructure and the expected catchment area of each facility.

- **Recommendations:** The identification of shortfalls (or lack thereof) in the provision of social infrastructure over the Local Area Plan period will allow a recommendation to be made whether services should be expanded. This would allow the identification of suitable sites (zoned or otherwise) and development of appropriate objectives for the provision of new social/community infrastructure in the Draft Local Area Plan.

## 1.2 National Policy Context

### 1.2.1 National Planning Framework (NPF)

The National Planning Framework is the Government’s high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of our country out to the year 2040. It includes Social and Community development within its outlined National Strategic Outcomes, in terms of access to social infrastructure as the marker of a successful settlement.



NSO 10 'Access to Quality Childcare, Education and Health Services' states the following: 'Good access to a range of quality education and health services, relative to the scale of a region, city, town, neighbourhood or community is a defining characteristic of attractive, successful and competitive places. Compact, smart growth in urban areas and strong and stable rural communities will enable the enhanced and effective provision of a range of accessible services.'

Chapter 4 'Making Stronger Urban Places' makes reference to the importance of community in urban places alongside adequate access to services. National Policy Objective 4 aims to 'ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being.'

Chapter 6 'People, Homes and Communities' identifies, in broad terms, the elements supporting quality of life, several of which would generally fall into definitions of social infrastructure, e.g. health, education, and leisure. This chapter also states that, among other elements, 'our ability to access services and amenities, such as education and healthcare [...], the leisure and social interactions available to us and the prospect of securing employment all combine to make a real difference to people’s lives. Figure 6.2 (see Figure 1 below)



comprises a broad indication of the level of service provision that applies to settlements of varying sizes, as envisioned by the NPF.

Though the settlement hierarchy under the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 does not sit exactly onto the levels shown in this figure, Blessington may fall somewhere between 'Smaller Towns and Villages' and 'Large Towns', based on its position as a strong and active town that acts as the service centre for a wide rural catchment, strategically located on the N81 in the vicinity of the Dublin metropolitan area.

NPO 26 also has relevance to the provision of social infrastructure and states the following:  
*'Support the objectives of public health policy including Healthy Ireland and the National Physical Activity Plan, though integrating such policies, where appropriate and at the applicable scale, with planning policy.'*

The NPF in multiple instances highlights that the provision of facilities and services must be tailored for use by a multitude of groups of differing interest and ability, as follows:

NPO 28 states: *'Plan for a more diverse and socially inclusive society that targets equality of opportunity and a better quality of life for all citizens, through improved integration and greater accessibility in the delivery of sustainable communities and the provision of associated services.'*



**Figure 1.1:** Level of service provision (Figure 6.2 of the National Planning Framework)

While, in relation to the elderly in particular, NPO 30 states: *'Local planning, housing, transport/ accessibility and leisure policies will be developed with a focus on meeting the needs and opportunities of an ageing population along with the inclusion of specific projections, supported by clear proposals in respect of ageing communities as part of the core strategy of city and county development plans.'*

In relation to children and young people, the NPF states that *'the number of people aged 15 or under will continue to increase until the early 2020's and decline only slowly thereafter. This means that the continued provision and enhancement of facilities and amenities for children and young people, such as childcare, schools, playgrounds, parks and sportsgrounds, remains necessary and will need to be maintained at similar levels for*

*the foreseeable future thereafter.* Under this section the NPF makes reference to the support for national policy including *'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures'*. Despite a predicted decline in the number of children in Ireland in the coming years, the NPF stresses that *'childcare provision in Ireland is reaching capacity and new planning approaches and sustained investment will be required, particularly in areas of disadvantage and population growth, to increase capacity and enable existing services to meet regulatory and quality requirements.'* It also infers that 'childcare' includes school-age childcare and early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).

The above discussion on childcare is summarised within NPO 31, which states the following:

*'Prioritise the alignment of targeted and planned population and employment growth with investment in:*

- *A childcare/ECCE planning function, for monitoring, analysis and forecasting of investment needs, including identification of regional priorities;*
- *The provision of childcare facilities and new and refurbished schools on well-located sites within or close to existing built-up areas, that meet the diverse needs of local populations;*
- *The expansion and consolidation of Higher Education facilities, particularly where this will contribute to wider regional development, and*
- *Programmes for life-long learning, especially in areas of higher education and further education and training where skills gaps are identified.'*

Section 6.6 of the NPF, in relation to housing, includes NPO 33, which states the following: *'Prioritise the provision of new homes at locations that can support sustainable development and at an appropriate scale of provision relative to location.'*

Within this section it is clarified that 'sustainable development' in relation to the location of housing can be characterised as places *'which support growth, innovation and the efficient provision of infrastructure, are accessible to a range of local services, can encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling, and help tackle climate change'*. On this basis it is clear that the NPF envisions that social infrastructure and services that would reasonably be expected to be a town such as Blessington would be within walking or cycling distance.



## 1.2.2 National Guidelines

### **Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities 2007**

Section 4.3 'Building Sustainable Communities' sets out that, in general, *'the availability of a school, shop and bus stop will usually be the minimum level of available services/facilities'* in housing areas outside mixed use centres.

### **Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2001**

The guidelines set out the following quantitative standards: *'For new housing areas, an average of one childcare facility for each 75 dwellings would be appropriate. The threshold for provision should be established having regard to the existing geographical distribution of childcare facilities and the emerging demographic profile of areas. Authorities could consider requiring the provision of larger units catering for up to 30/40 children in areas of major residential development on the basis that such a large facility might be able to offer a variety of services – sessional/drop in/after-school, etc.'* This figure can be altered based on assumption made in the number of proposed units which will need childcare, and on development plan/childcare committee identified gaps in provision.

### **Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2024:**

The guidelines do not include specific references to 'social infrastructure', however guiding principles in Section 4.4.(ii), in terms of a mix and distribution of uses, promote a move away from segregated land use areas (residential, commercial and employment) that have reinforced unsustainable travel in favour of mixed use neighbourhoods. In less central areas, the mix of uses should cater for local services and amenities focused around a hierarchy of local centres that support residential communities and with opportunities for suitable non-residential development throughout.

The guidelines also make reference to the '15 minute city' concept.

Section 4.4(iv) of the guidelines states that all statutory development plans should include a strategy for the provision of an integrated hierarchy of public open spaces and corridors across the plan area to meet the needs of the planned population.

The level of provision should take account of the needs of the planned population, protected zones, landscape character and statutory obligations to protect certain habitats and biodiversity. Ideally, all residents within a settlement will have access to a multi-functional public open space within walking distance of their home.

### **The Provision of Schools and the Planning System - Code of Practice for Planning Authorities 2008 [and other guidance]**

The guidelines set out that the department of Education and Science will forecast the likely demand for schooling and will provide this information to the Local Authority as part of the consultation process on development plans. The guidelines further set out design standards in relation to new schools and their locations.

In further consultation, the Departments of Education has provided the following assumptions in relation to the population who require schooling at any given time:

- 11.5% of the population at any given time is of primary school going age.

- 7.5% of the population at any given time is of post primary school going age.

Technical Guidance document TGD-025 'Identification and Suitability Assessment of Sites for Primary Schools' (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) sets out a range of suitable areas for primary schools dependant on the number of classrooms required and whether the building is one or two stories. For example, a two storey, 8 to 16 classroom primary schools would require a site of c. 10.4 ha.

Technical Guidance document TGD-027 'Identification and Suitability Assessment of Sites for Post Primary Schools' (Revision 1) sets out a range of suitable areas for post primary schools dependant on the intended number of pupils. For example, a post primary school catering to 1,000 pupils would require a site of c. 4.57 ha, although if located near playing pitches could be accommodated on a site of 3.5ha.

### **National Sports Policy 2018-2027**

Action 20 of the National Sports Policy includes a review of swimming pool provision to identify where gaps exist and how these can be met. Furthermore, it is stated in the text of the plan under this section that *'while Exchequer funding has been secured to cover commitments in relation to the swimming pools which are already in the LASPP, consideration will be given to allowing Local Authorities to apply for new projects under the LSSIF.'* [Acronyms: Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme/Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund.]

## **1.3 Regional Policy Context**

### **1.3.1 EMRA Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES)**

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly's Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy contains multiple objectives in relation to the provision of social infrastructure.



**Figure 1.2: RSES Healthy Placemaking Strategy**



Section 9.4 'Healthy Placemaking', includes objectives focusing on the multi-functionality, adaptability and inclusivity of social infrastructure for the purpose of social cohesion, as follows:

RPO 9.12: *'In Planning policy formulation and implementation local authorities and other stakeholders shall be informed by the need to cater for all levels of disability, through the appropriate mitigation of the built environment, and in particular for the needs of an ageing population.'*

RPO 9.13: Local authorities and relevant agencies shall ensure that new social infrastructure developments are accessible and inclusive for a range of users by adopting a universal design approach and provide for an age friendly society in which people of all ages can live full, active, valued and healthy lives.

In relation to the provision of recreation and open space facilities, the RSES includes the following objectives, focusing on the adequate provision of a variety of facilities and support for national sport and physical activity policies:

RPO 9.14: *'Local authorities shall seek to support the planned provision of easily accessible social, community, cultural and recreational facilities and ensure that all communities have access to a range of facilities that meet the needs of the communities they serve.'*

RPO 9.15: *'Local authorities shall support the vision and objectives of the National Sports Policy, including working with local sports partnerships, clubs, communities and partnerships within and beyond sport, to increase sport and physical activity participation levels locally.'*

RPO 9.16: *'Local authorities shall support the objectives of public health policy including Healthy Ireland and the National Physical Activity Plan, through integrating such policies, where appropriate and at the applicable scale, with planning policies contained in development plans.'*

RPO 9.17: *'To support local authorities in the development of regional scale Open Space and Recreational facilities particularly those close to large or growing population centres in the Region.'*

Included in this section are guiding principles in planning for recreation and open space, which recommend the co-location of services between sports providers, education, and other facilities to maximise use; the integration of play provision and child-friendly neighbourhoods; and the provision of dedicated youth spaces in key urban areas and the development of multi-function spaces in smaller communities/rural areas.

Section 9.6 'Access to Childcare, Education and Health Services' states that there is currently a 'misalignment' in the Region across school provision, facilities and child friendly amenities and further states that it is through county development plan/local area plan policy that provision will be made on the location of new school facilities, in co-ordination with the Department of Education and Science. Relevant objectives include the following;

RPO 9.21: *'In areas where significant new housing is proposed, an assessment of need regarding schools provision should be carried out in collaboration with the Department of Education and Skills and statutory plans shall designate new school sites at accessible, pedestrian, cycle and public transport friendly locations.'*

RPO 9.23: *'Facilitate the development of primary health care centres, hospitals, clinics, and facilities to cater for the specific needs of an ageing population in appropriate urban areas in accordance with RSES settlement strategy and core strategies of development plans.'*

Though Chapter 8 is not directly related to social infrastructure policy, Section 8.3 *'Framework for the Integration of Transport planning with Spatial Planning Policies'* includes the following guiding principal of relevance:

*'Support the '10 minute' settlement concept, whereby a range of community facilities and services are accessible in short walking and cycling timeframes from homes or accessible by high quality public transport to these services in larger settlements.'*

## 1.4 County & Local Policy Context

### 1.4.1 Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 - 2028

Chapter 7 of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 concerns social and community development.

This chapter sets out the Community Facilities Hierarchy Model for the county, which lists the social and community facilities that are considered appropriate for settlements of varying sizes, as represented by four levels:

COMMUNITY FACILITIES HIERARCHY MODEL	
<b>LEVEL 1 – SETTLEMENTS WITH POPULATION RANGE 15,000 – 30,000</b>	
Multi-purpose Community Resource Centre Regional and Local Indoor Sports and Recreation Facilities Swimming Pool/Leisure Centre Youth Centre Athletics Track and Field Facilities Arts and Cultural Centre Local Multi-Purpose Community Space/Meeting rooms	Outdoor Water Sports Facilities (where applicable) Neighbourhood Parks and Local Parks Outdoor (full size) Multi-Use Games Areas – Synthetic/ Hardcourt Playground(s) Playing Pitches Alternative/Minority Sports Facilities Open Space/Urban Woodlands/Nature Areas Library
Acceptable rural catchment commuting time by car: 30 min	
<b>LEVEL 2 – SETTLEMENTS WITH POPULATION RANGE 7,000 – 15,000</b>	
Multi-purpose Community Resource Centre Sport & Recreation Centre Swimming Pool/Leisure Centre Youth Resource Centre Local Multi-Purpose Community Space/Meeting Rooms Outdoor Water Sports Facilities (where applicable) Neighbourhood and Local Parks	Outdoor Multi-Use Games Areas – Synthetic/ Hardcourt Playground(s) Playing Pitches Alternative/Minority Sports Facilities Open Space/Urban Woodlands/Nature Areas Library Arts and Cultural Centre
Acceptable rural catchment time by car: 15 mins	
<b>LEVEL 3 – SETTLEMENTS WITH POPULATION RANGE 2,000 – 7,000</b>	
Community/Parish Hall Multi-purpose Community Space/Meeting Rooms Local /Town Park (s) and Open Spaces/Nature Areas Outdoor Multi-Use Games Area – Synthetic/ Hardcourt	Playgrounds Playing Pitches Library
Acceptable rural catchment commuting time by car: 10-15 mins	
<b>LEVEL 4 – SETTLEMENTS WITH POPULATION RANGE &lt; 2,000</b>	
Community/Parish Hall Open Spaces/Play Areas	Outdoor Multi-Use Games Area – Synthetic/ Hardcourt Playing Pitches
Acceptable rural catchment commuting time by car: 5-10 mins	

**Table 1.1:** Community Facilities Hierarchy Model

A wide variety of objectives are set out in the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 in relation to social infrastructure. These will be referred to, where relevant, throughout the Social Infrastructure Audit.

There are general objectives on community development, with **CPO 7.2** stating that 'During the local plan-making process for towns and villages, to seek to facilitate community development and socially inclusive communities, through proper land-use zoning and transportation planning, phasing and the setting out of high standards of design in both streets and buildings.'

In addition, **CPO 7.5** addresses the need for a Social Infrastructure Audit to be carried out for certain housing development applications;

*"Housing development shall be managed and phased to ensure that infrastructure is adequate or is being provided to match the needs of new residents'. New significant residential or mixed use development proposals (of which residential development forms a component)<sup>3</sup>, shall be required to be accompanied by a **Social Infrastructure Audit**, to determine if social and community facilities in the area are sufficient to provide for the needs of the future residents. Where deficiencies are identified, proposals will be required to either rectify the deficiency, or suitably restrict or phase the development in accordance with the capacity of existing or planned services.*

*New significant residential or mixed use development proposals shall be required to be accompanied by a **'Accessibility Report'** that demonstrates that new residents / occupants / employees (including children and those with special mobility needs) will be able to safely access through means **other than** the private car*  
*(a) local services including shops, schools, health care and recreational and sports facilities, and*  
*(b) public transport services.*

*Where deficiencies are identified, proposals will be required to either rectify the deficiency, or suitably restrict or phase the development in accordance with the capacity/quality of existing or planned linkages".*

There are a number of specific objectives in relation to education and development in Chapter 7 that mainly focus on the zoning of suitable sites for schools.

This chapter also covers objectives on 'Health and Care', 'Residential & Day Care' developments, 'Childcare & Preschool', 'Leisure & Recreation', 'Open Space', Arts & Culture' and 'Social Enterprise'.

### **Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 - Development and Design Standards**

Appendix 1 of the County Development Plan sets out Development and Design Standards as relevant to the required provision of social infrastructure (but not regarding internal layout, etc., of such facilities):

Section 7.1 'Social Infrastructure Audits' states:

- *Where specified by the Planning Authority, new significant residential or mixed use development proposals (of which residential development forms a component) may be required to provide a social and community facility/facilities as part of the proposed development or the developer may be required to carry out a social infrastructure audit, to determine if social and community facilities in the area are sufficient to provide for the needs of the future residents. For all proposals including 100 units or more, a social infrastructure audit shall be submitted with the planning application. Where deficiencies are identified, proposals will be required to either rectify the deficiency, or suitably restrict or phase the development in accordance with the capacity of existing or planned services.*
- *A "Social Infrastructure Audit" assesses the overall impact a new development will have on the infrastructure which is key to the functioning of the community. This is generally assessed based on the percentage increase of population that a development once completed will bring to the community where the development is planned to occur. At a minimum, education, childcare/preschool, and open space/play/recreation facilities are assessed (refer to full text of Appendix 1 for further information).*

Section 7.2 'Childcare states:

- *'As a general rule 20 childcare spaces shall be provided for every 75 dwelling units.'*
- *'Childcare facilities will be required to be provided in large-scale employment zone developments. Any application for employment development with in excess of 100 employees shall include a childcare facility unless it can be shown, with regard to the demographic of the workforce or the availability of existing facilities in the immediate area that no such service is necessary.'*

Section 7.4 'Nursing Homes' states:

- *'Nursing home developments and facilities for the elderly shall be located close to local amenities and where adequate pedestrian infrastructure has been or is capable of being provided'*

Section 8.1 'Active Open Spaces (AOS)' states:

- *In accordance with the Planning Authority's Active Open Space Policy, active open space shall be required as a rate of 2.4ha per 1,000 population divided into:*
  - *1.6ha outdoor play space (pitches, courts, sports grounds)*
  - *0.6ha casual play spaces (parks)*
  - *0.2ha equipped play space (playgrounds and MUGAs)*
- *'Normally, public AOS in accordance with this standard will be zoned through the local plan process and individual development will be required to either deliver some or all of the space required (through an action area agreement) or via development levies. However, where such provision has not been made in a local plan, any application or Action Area Plan which would result in a resident population of 1,000 or more, compliance with this standard will be required.'*

Section 8.2 'Neighbourhood Parks' states:

- *'Neighbourhood parks should be ideally located within 800 metres of the population served;'*
- *'Neighbourhood parks may be provided as part of a number of housing developments, in part delivery of residential open space requirements (see below).'*

Section 8.3 'Equipped Play Spaces' states

- The siting and location of playgrounds / mixed use games areas (MUGAs) shall take account of the surrounding environment and be sited in order to ensure passive surveillance by neighbouring residential properties;
- The layout and positioning of apparatus shall exploit existing landscape features to provide adequate shade and shelter from wind for users and create visual harmony with the surrounding area;
- Play equipment shall generally be located no closer than:
  - 10 metres from the edge of a building or major structure;
  - 20 metres from adjoining residential property lines, the edge of any local road or car park pavement area.
  - 30 metres from distributor road pavements (if proposed to be closer, a perimeter fence will be required) 20 metres from hazards such as storm water drains, bike tracks and playing fields.

Section 8.4 'Allotments' states:

*Proposals for the development of allotments shall be evaluated against the following criteria:*

- *The suitability of the site location vis-à-vis the location of the population served – sites in or at the edge of the settlements will be preferred.*
- *The adequacy of the public road serving the site*
- *The adequacy of car parking.*
- *The adequacy of water supplies.*
- *The suitability of the land to absorb the somewhat haphazard appearance of allotments, which often include randomly positioned sheds, tunnels and greenhouses.*

Section 8.5 'Residential Public Open Space' states:

- *'Public open space will normally be required at a rate of 15% of the site area – areas within the site that are not suitable for development or for recreational use must be excluded before the calculation is made;'*
- *'Where a public park is being provided by the same developer (or by a group of developers in a combined Action Area) in close proximity to the residential development site, the public open space provided on site may be reduced to 7.5% of the residential site area, with the remainder being made up in the park;'*



- *'In greenfield developments, subject to the size of the site, a hierarchy of open spaces shall be provided to provide for the different play needs of different age groups. In this regard, all developments shall aim to include: - At least one, flat space with dimensions on not less than 20m x 40m, suitable for ball games (trees should only be planted around the perimeter) - A number of smaller spaces immediately adjacent to dwellings, with interesting contours and natural features, suitable for play activities of younger children.'*
- *'In larger developments (in excess of 1ha), consideration should be given to dedicating part of the residential open space (not exceeding 25% of the total space) to community gardens; at a minimum, landscaping plans will be required to identify a suitable area (in terms of soil type, gradient, light, drainage etc) within the residential open space area that would be suitable for future community garden use by the resident community.'*

#### **1.4.2 Wicklow LECP 2024**

The Wicklow Local Economic & Community Plan 2024 is a six-year plan setting out measures necessary to promote and support community and economic development within the county. The LECP is not a land use plan. However, where any of the aims or objectives within the LECP have a spatial component, it may be necessary to integrate and facilitate such spatial components into Local Area Plans.

Those objectives within the LECP related to social infrastructure, and which have some degree of a spatial component that could be addressed in an LAP, are as follows:

*4.4: Address gaps in service delivery in the county.*

*5.1: Drive the environmental, economic and social regeneration of County Wicklow's towns and villages and their hinterlands*

*5.3: Support the provision of community, sport and recreational infrastructure for communities*

#### **1.4.3 County Wicklow Sports and Recreation Policy 2004**

Quantitative social infrastructure standards, as included within this policy document, include the following:

- *'The Council will ensure where possible that proper provision of sport and recreation facilities is provided as part of new developments. As a guideline, the Council will in future aim to make provision for an average of 200m<sup>2</sup> multi-use community space per 1000 population, or where an identified need exists, which includes provision for sports and recreation activity.'*
- *'The Council will provide for open space including provision for sport and recreation according to the minimum provision of 2.0Ha. per 1,000 population under Action 41 of Sustainable Communities in 'Outlook'.'*
- *'The Council will ensure that within all Local Area Plans (LAPs) appropriate and sufficient land is clearly identified for amenity and sporting and recreation uses and provide protection for open space that is or has the potential to be of value to the community.'*
- *'The Council will promote accessibility by locating local facilities within walking distance, cycling distance or on public transport routes and having regard to issues of security and personal safety'.*
- *'The Council will seek to ensure that open spaces and recreation areas are located, designed and maintained so as to minimise the risk of crime and vandalism by: • Clustering facilities • Locating facilities in places which are overlooked, providing indirect supervision • Providing teenage facilities such as shelters<sup>8</sup>, seating areas and MUGA facilities<sup>9</sup> in accordance with County Wicklow Play Policy open space standards.'*

#### 1.4.4 County Wicklow Play Policy

Objective 3 of the County Wicklow Play Policy relates to the provision of playgrounds. Within these objectives, the following items involving either a quantitative standard or spatial component may be of relevance:

- *'Aim to provide adequate and appropriate hierarchies of open spaces for play as recommended in National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) standards.'* [the 'Six Acre Standard', i.e. 2.4 hectares per 1,000 persons]
- *'Ensure play areas will include enough space for equipment and general open spaces for games, tree planning and environmental enhancements'.*
- *'This Policy will be incorporated within the County Development Plan, Local Area Plans'.*

The play policy states the quantitative standards in relation to equipped and informal play space, which are integrated into the County Development Plan above.

#### 1.4.5 Healthy Wicklow 2018

Wicklow County Council produced the 'Healthy Wicklow' strategy in line with the 'National Activity Plan' and the 'Healthy Ireland' framework. The document aims to assess the requirements and provides objectives with which to improve the overall health and wellbeing of the people of Wicklow and is guided with the four following key goals:

*Goal 1 Increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life*

*Goal 2 Reduce health inequalities*

*Goal 3 Protect the public from threats to health and wellbeing*

*Goal 4 Create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland*

#### 1.4.6 Wicklow Age Friendly Strategy 2023-27

The vision of County Wicklow Age Friendly Strategy is to make County Wicklow a great place to grow old, where older people are respected and valued, living full lives, ageing in place within their communities. The document seeks to address existing issues and improve the conditions for the ageing population in Wicklow under 8 themes. Those actions related to social infrastructure that may have a spatial land use component are listed, where relevant, under the themes below:

##### **Theme 1:** Outdoor Spaces and Buildings

*Action 1.1: Ensure Age Friendly principles and consideration of older people is embedded in all plans including, CDP, LA Plans, T & V, CLÁR, ORIS, etc, taking account of feedback from the public consultation process.*

*Action 1.5: Provide Age Friendly seating/infrastructure in appropriate places in each Municipal District, including 'Chatting Benches'.*

*Action 1.12: Facilitate development of green spaces and open spaces for recreational use – Tone Zones, Age Friendly Exercise Equipment and Dog Parks.*

##### **Theme 2:** Transportation

*Action 2.6: Enhance access to recreation/heritage/outdoor facilities for older persons including transport*

##### **Theme 3:** Housing

##### **Theme 4:** Social Participation

##### **Theme 5:** Respect and Social Inclusion

##### **Theme 6:** Civic Participation and Employment

##### **Theme 7:** Communication and Information

##### **Theme 8:** Community Support and Health Services

##### **Theme 9:** Safety and Security

#### 1.4.7 Wicklow Children and Young People Plan 2020

Wicklow Children and Young People's Services Committee [CYPSC] was formally established in April 2011. The purpose of the Children and Young People's Services Committees is to secure better outcomes for children and young people through more effective co-operation and collaboration by existing services and through interventions at local level. Between 2011 and to date, two action plans have been developed and implemented to address local needs as consistent with the national outcomes framework. The Wicklow CYPSC 2020 Plan will continue to progress necessary work to meet ongoing and emerging needs.

CYPSCs work towards the five national outcomes for children and young people in Ireland. These are that children and young people:

1. Are active and healthy, with positive physical and mental wellbeing
2. Are achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development
3. Are safe and protected from harm
4. Have economic security and opportunity
5. Are connected, respected and contributing to their world

The CYPP presents a coordinated interagency approach to the delivery of services to children and young people in Wicklow by all agencies in Wicklow. It reflects the priorities that have been identified from an analysis of the needs in the County and a commitment by members to address these needs over the three years of the plan. The voice of children and young people is represented and the CYPSC is committed to strengthening participation with children and young people further during the lifetime of this plan.

#### 1.4.8 Blessington Local Area Plan 2013

Chapter 6 of the Blessington Local Area Plan (LAP) 2013 addressed Social Infrastructure.

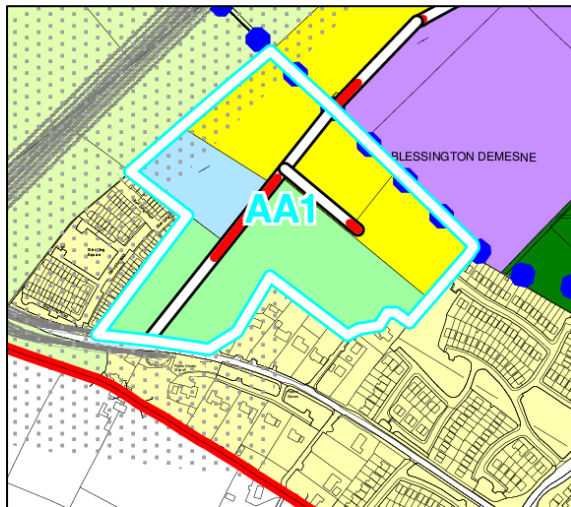
The objectives contained within this chapter are as follows:

- CD1** *To ensure sufficient lands are zoned for community needs within the plan area and to implement the objectives of the Chapter 15 'Social and Community Infrastructure' of the Wicklow County Development 2010 - 2016 as applicable to the plan area.*
- CD2** *To co-operate with the Department of Education & Skills, the Vocational Education Committee for Co. Wicklow and school management boards in the provision of school places where a need is identified.*
- CD3** *To facilitate opportunities for play and sport and support the implementation of the County Council 'Play' and 'Sports & Recreation' Policies and their objectives, including the collection of development levies.*
- CD4** *The redevelopment for alternative uses of open space and recreational lands whether owned by private recreational clubs or publicly owned, will normally be resisted by the Council unless suitable alternative recreational facilities can be provided in a convenient location.*

The Blessington LAP 2013 used catchment figures of both 10,000 and 15,000 in its demand forecast analysis, depending on the type of facility.

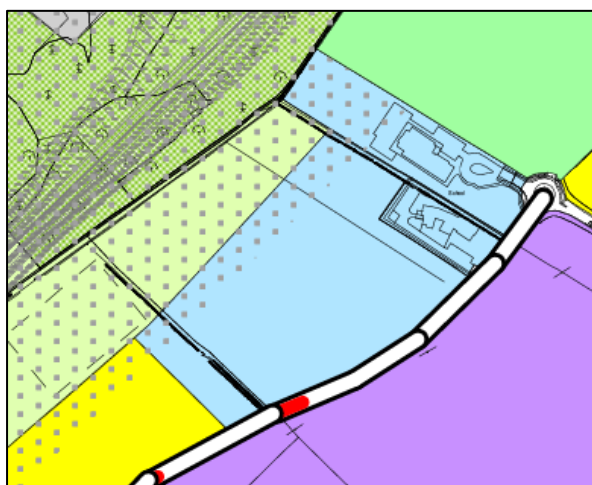
The Blessington Local Area Plan indicates that the following areas of zoned land were designated for the provision of identified shortfalls in social infrastructure:

*'[I]t is considered prudent to provide for adequate zoned 'Community and Educational' (CE) land within the plan area for the development of a new primary school if the need arises. Having regard to this the plan has zoned lands within Action Area 1 for Community and Educational purposes capable of meeting this demand.'*



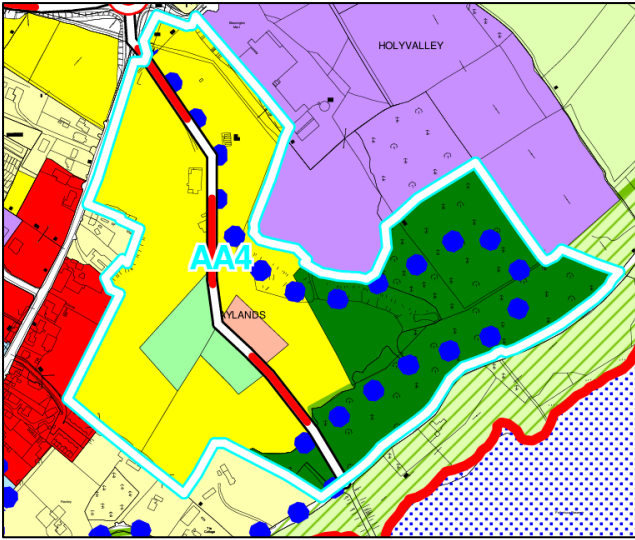
**Figure 1.3:** Action Area 1, Blessington LAP 2013-2019

*'[T]his plan will make provision for both (a) maintenance of CE zoned land around the existing secondary school to allow for possible expansion and (b) the zoning of sufficient greenfield CE land to accommodate another post primary school. This is located adjacent to the Blessington No. 1 National School on the west side of the settlement, close to existing sports facilities.'*



**Figure 1.4:** CE zoned land adjacent to Blessington No. 1 National School, Blessington LAP 2013-2019.

*'As the town grows, there may however be a need for further spaces and this plan shall make provision for the development of a community space in Action Area 4 and shall also require any new secondary school to be so designed to provide for space suitable for other non-educational uses.'* [Note that Action Area 4 does not contain CE zonings, rather this is required to be provided in the Neighbourhood Centre zoning in AA4 by the text of the Action Area.]



**Figure 1.5:** Action Area 4, Blessington LAP 2013-2019.

[In relation to Burgage Cemetery:] *'This cemetery is however nearing capacity and this plan shall make provision for an area of zoned 'CE' land to the immediate east of the existing cemetery.'*



**Figure 1.6:** Cemetery Expansion/Car parking lands in Action Area 3, Blessington LAP 2013-2019.

Appendix 4 of the Blessington Local Area Plan 2013-2019 quantifies the various zonings as follows:

Zoning	Use	Location	Area (ha)
CE	Community Facility	Dorans Pit	0.075
CE	Graveyard extension	Burgage Mor	0.8
Total Lands to be provided			0.875

*Table 3.1 Community Facility Zonings*



Zoning	Use	Location	Area (ha)
CE	New Primary School	Blessington Demesne West within Action Area 1	1.22
<b>Total Lands to be provided</b>			<b>1.22</b>

*Table 3.2 Primary Educational Zonings*

Location	Zoning	Area	Description
New Town Park	AOS	0.781	Tennis Courts and Bowling Green tied into Cookehill permission
Burgage More Option (1)	AOS	3.951	Optional Playing Fields
Naas Road Land	AOS	4.51	Optional Playing Fields
Burgage More Option (2a)	AOS	3.352	Playing Fields
Burgage More Option (2b Extension)	AOS	3.646	Optional Playing Fields
GAA Lands	AOS	8	Existing Facilities
<b>Totals</b>		<b>24.24</b>	

*table 5.1 Active Open Space Provision*

Location	Zoning	Area (ha)	Description
Existing Wicklow Coco Playground	CE	0.06	Existing Playground adjacent to Oakdrive
Hard Surface Play Area	CE	0.72	Hard Surfaced Courts at Lakeview
Proposed Doran's pit phase 1 - AA4	OS	1	Provision of a Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP)
Proposed Doran's Pit Phase 2 (AA4)	OS	0.5	Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP)
Proposed Open Area adjoining St. Josephs Road	OS	0.06	Equipped Playground facilities
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2.34</b>	

*Table 5.2 Equipped Play Spaces*

Location	Zoning	Area (ha)	Description
Green Area Adjacent to Rockypool Villas	OS	0.117	Informal Green Space
Proposed Public Park Area within Opportunity Site 4	OS	0.3	Informal Open Space Area with Hard and Soft Landscaping
Proposed open Area adjoining St. Josephs Road – Redevelopment	OS	0.167	Redevelopment of existing Area with the provision of hard and soft landscaping
Proposed New Town Centre Public Park	OS	14.9	New Public Park Located on Downshire Lands
Parkland areas adjoining the Blessington Stream along the Naas Road	OS	3.82	OS/Public Park Area
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>19.3</b>	

**Table 5.3 Casual Play Space Provision**

Location	Zoning	Area (ha)	Description
East of Dorans Pit adjoining the Kilbride Road	OS and Amenity	10.8	Open Space in the form of a landscaped wood with walkways and picnic areas
Business/Open Space Amenity Park to the west of the N81 at Roadstone.	OS and Amenity	49.3 overall site including EMP element	Open Space and Amenity Park with employment uses at a plot ratio of 0.1.
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>60.1</b>	

**Table 5.4 Open Space and Amenity Zonings**

### 1.4.9 Blessington Health Check (Phases 1 & 2)

Phase 1 of the Blessington Health Check does not discuss the provision of social infrastructure.

Phase 2 of the Blessington Health Check sets out the following recommendations in relation to the provision of Social Infrastructure:

No.	Action	Partners	Timeframe
1	Parks – Blessington is notable for the absence of any large public park. With land beyond the new town development zoned ‘open space’ there is a potential location for the creation of a large park. However, there are also several opportunities for smaller, but more central parks to be developed. Pocket-parks could be located at Dempsey’s Lane and St Joseph’s Green, with the latter offering a larger space for development.	Wicklow CoCo, Blessington Tidy Towns, Blessington Forum, Residents Assocs.	Short Term
2	MUGA – Multi-use Games Areas are sports facilities that can accommodate a range of sports, such as basketball and football. Such facilities offer adolescents, as well as adults, opportunities to engage in physical exercise, without the need to join clubs. Furthermore, the use of Council lands at Burgage could be considered for the development of a recreation zone with a multi-disciplinary facility that includes a swimming pool.	Wicklow CoCo, Local Sports Partnership, Sport Clubs	Medium Term
3	Gardaí – The possibility of extending the operating hours of the Local Garda Station should be explored.	An Gardaí, Blessington Town Team, Wicklow CoCo JPC	Medium Term
4	Evening Activities – The example of the Purple Flag initiative should be followed, with improvements to Blessington’s night-time economy made. Main Street should be just as active during the night as it is during the day, which will require more late-night restaurants and other facilities.	Business Owners, Retailers, Blessington Town Team	Medium Term
5	History and Heritage – Enhancing the ‘sense of place’ contributes towards more cohesive communities as it provides a town with a strong identity. The creation of a ‘story’ for Blessington, with character areas, such as the Market Square, developed to act as a link to this story will contribute towards the sense of place.	Wicklow CoCo, Heritage Council, Blessington History Soc, Blessington Town Team	Short Term

#### **1.4.10 Blessington Town Centre First Plan**

In December 2021, Blessington was designated Wicklow's only 'pathfinder' town for the emerging Town Centre First (TCF) policy approach for Irish towns. This led to the preparation of the Blessington Town Centre First Plan in February 2024, which builds on previous town centre health checks and sets out a range of projects for the improvement of Blessington Town Centre with identified funding streams. Projects in relation to the provision of social infrastructure include:

Project No. 5: Supporting Community Amenity

*- Includes proposals for the development of a Greenway Hub and Leisure Centre.*

Project No. 6: Town Centre Green Space Network.

*- Includes proposals for the development of a range of green spaces, including a linear green space between Market and Newtown Squares.*

## PART 2 SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AUDIT – EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEMAND FORECAST ANALYSIS

### 2.0 Population and Administrative boundaries

The 2016 Census revealed a population in Blessington of 5,520, of which 5,234 was estimated to be located in the boundaries of County Wicklow. The town's total population grew only marginally between 2016 and 2022, to 5,611 (Census 2022). It is estimated that the population within the boundaries of Co. Wicklow is c. 5,325 persons.

As per the Core Strategy of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028, the population target for Blessington (in Co. Wicklow) in Q2 2028 is 6,145, with a housing growth target of an additional 514 units for the 2016-2031 period. The target population of Blessington (in Co. Wicklow) for 2031 is 6,313.

It is important to note that since the 2022 Census, there has been new residential development built in Blessington. It is likely that through planning permissions for residential development that are either recently completed, currently under construction and permissions that have not commenced yet, the 2031 population target will be fulfilled well before that date.

It is not within the remit of Wicklow County Council to plan for the area of Blessington located within Co. Kildare. However, drawing a hard boundary for the purpose of a social infrastructure audit may produce distorted results. Omitting the population within Blessington-in-Kildare from demand forecast analysis would also require the omission of all social infrastructure located within that area. For example, a primary school is located just outside the Wicklow county boundary. This school likely serves a much wider catchment than the residential area of Blessington-in-Kildare, and its omission would artificially reduce the capacity of school places within the study area. Furthermore, as the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 has been just recently adopted, the provision of social infrastructure and land zoned for such purposes in Blessington-in-Kildare is unlikely to change for the duration of the upcoming Local Area Plan period. The use of the CSO Census 2022 Built Up Area population and all social infrastructure contained therein in this audit will allow good alignment and certainty in the provision of social infrastructure, and land zoned for such purposes, between the Kildare County Development Plan, Wicklow County Development Plan, and the Blessington Local Area Plan.

On this basis, demand forecast analysis within the below Social Infrastructure Audit will generally use the CSO Census 2022 Built Up Area (BUA) boundary in determining the baseline population and any catchment populations.

On this basis, the calculation of baseline and target catchment populations (see below) will have regard to the following where relevant:

- CSO Census 2022 Built Up Area Population of Blessington (Wicklow & Kildare): **5,611**
- WCC Population Total Target 2031 for Blessington: **6,313**
- KCC Population Total Target 2029 for Blessington: **735<sup>1</sup>**
- Where relevant to catchment populations, the CSO Census 2022 populations of smaller settlements in the area.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that this figure is the total population for the target year, accounting for CSO Census 2022 population of the small area corresponding to the area of Blessington in Co. Kildare (484 No. persons), and the stated **additional** population target (251 No. persons) as per the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029.



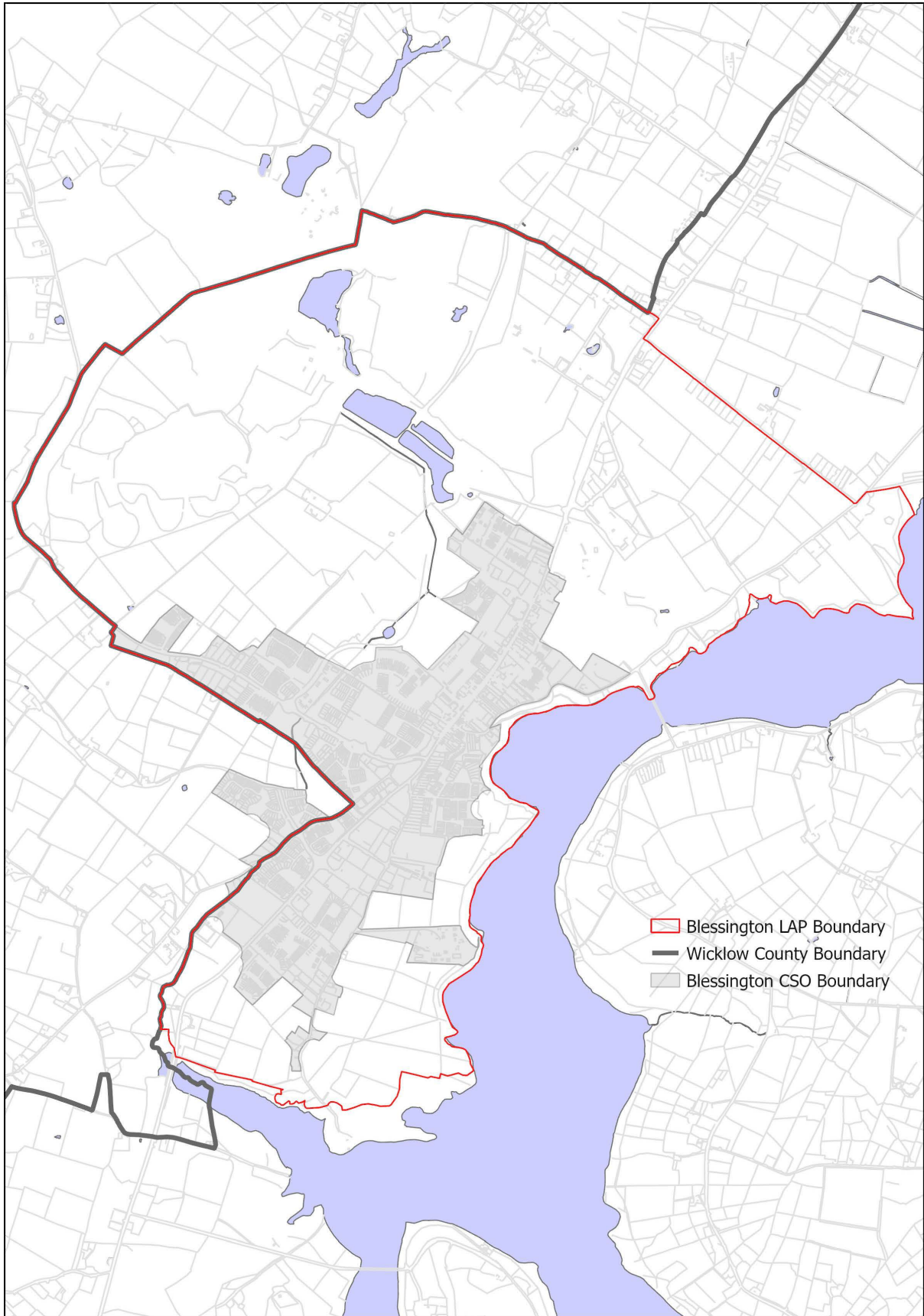
- Where relevant to catchment populations, the targeted growth rates of smaller settlements in the area as per the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028, and the Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029.

Having regard to the above, the baseline and target population of Blessington (Wicklow & Kildare)<sup>2</sup> are as follows:

<b>CSO Built Up Area Population 2022 (A)</b>	<b>WCC Population Target 2031 (B)</b>	<b>KCC CDP Population Target 2029 (C)</b>	<b>Target population for study period: (B+C+D)</b>
<b>5,611</b>	6,313	735	<b>7,048</b>
<b>BASELINE</b>			<b>TARGET</b>

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the town as represented by the CSO Built Up Area and LAP boundaries do not perfectly align. It is logical that land zoned for development in the LAP, but that is yet to be developed, cannot be included in the 'Built Up Area' boundary. As the vast majority of the population within the LAP boundary (and Kildare CDP boundary where relevant) are represented within the CSO Built Up Area boundary, there is little discrepancy in using a Built Up Area baseline population and a LAP boundary target population.



**Figure 2.1:** Administrative boundaries around Blessington. Note that the indicated boundary is that of the Blessington Local Area Plan 2013, which may be subject to change.

## Age Profile

A review of the Blessington age profile confirmed that the age profile weighted generally towards a younger and middle aged population. The settlements population is dominated by children aged 0 – 19 years and by people in the working age group (30 – 59 years).

Age Range	CSO Population 2022	% of Total 2022
0-9	775	13.8
10-19	1045	18.6
20-29	486	8.7
30-39	713	12.7
40-49	1066	19.0
50-59	771	13.7
60-69	404	7.2
70+	351	6.3

### 2.1 Placement of the settlement of Blessington on the Community Facilities Hierarchy Model

Chapter 7 of the Wicklow County Development Plan sets out the Community Facilities Hierarchy Model for the county, which lists the social and community facilities that are considered necessary in settlements (according to their population range) as represented by four levels. Note that these levels do not correspond to the levels contained within the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 Settlement Hierarchy.

The above baseline population of 5,611 No. people indicates that Blessington currently sits at Level 3 of the Community Facilities Hierarchy Model – ‘Settlements with population range 2,000-7,000’.

LEVEL 3 – SETTLEMENTS WITH POPULATION RANGE 2,000 – 7,000	
Community/Parish Hall Multi-purpose Community Space/Meeting Rooms Local /Town Park (s) and Open Spaces/Nature Areas Outdoor Multi-Use Games Area – Synthetic/ Hardcourt	Playgrounds Playing Pitches Library
<i>Acceptable rural catchment commuting time by car: 10-15 mins</i>	

**Table 2.1** Extract of Community Facilities Hierarchy Model

The above target population of 7,953 indicates that Blessington will, by the end of the LAP period, sit at Level 2 of the Community Facilities Hierarchy Model – ‘Settlements with population range 7,000-15,000’. Therefore, in drafting the LAP, Blessington should be considered to be at Level 2 of the Community Facilities Hierarchy Model. On this basis, Blessington would ideally require the facilities listed here in Table 2.2:

LEVEL 2 – SETTLEMENTS WITH POPULATION RANGE 7,000 – 15,000	
Multi-purpose Community Resource Centre Sport & Recreation Centre Swimming Pool/Leisure Centre Youth Resource Centre Local Multi-Purpose Community Space/Meeting Rooms Outdoor Water Sports Facilities (where applicable) Neighbourhood and Local Parks	Outdoor Multi-Use Games Areas – Synthetic/ Hardcourt Playground(s) Playing Pitches Alternative/Minority Sports Facilities Open Space/Urban Woodlands/Nature Areas Library Arts and Cultural Centre
<i>Acceptable rural catchment time by car: 15 mins</i>	

**Table 2.2** Extract of Community Facilities Hierarchy Model

Blessington currently fulfils Level 2 of the Community Facility Hierarchy Model as follows:

Community Facility Hierarchy Level 2	Existing Blessington Community Infrastructure
Multi-purpose Community Resource Centre	The Coimín Centre.
Local Multi-Purpose Community Space/Meeting Rooms	St. Kevin’s Hall St. Joseph’s Hall
Sport & Recreation Centre	The Avon (private leisure centre/resort)
Swimming Pool/Leisure Centre	No swimming facilities are currently operating in Blessington
Youth Resource Centre	West Wicklow Youth Project (operating from St. Joseph’s Hall), West Wicklow Youth Reach (Training courses provided in Blessington FETC)
Outdoor Water Sports Facilities (where applicable)	Multiple clubs operate from the Poulaphouca Reservoir (e.g. sailing, kayaking)
Neighbourhood and Local Parks	New town park (partly under construction) Dempsey’s Lane,
Outdoor Multi-Use Games Areas – Synthetic/Hardcourt Playground(s)	Blessington Skate Park
Playground(s)	Blessington Playground
Playing Pitches	GAA grounds
Alternative/Minority Sports Facilities	Multiple fitness and martial arts clubs, water sports, dance studios, etc.
Open Space/Urban Woodlands/Nature Areas	Glen Ding Forest Blessington Lakes
Library	Blessington Library
Arts and Cultural Centre	The Tramway Theatre

**Table 2.3** Existing Community Facilities in Blessington

**DISCLAIMER NOTE** – This list presents an example of the facilities within the settlement and is not an exhaustive list. The listing of existing infrastructure in the above table does not infer that further facilities of that type may not be warranted, merely that a facility of each type is represented in Blessington. See below for facility capacity analysis under various headings.

## 2.2 Establishing a catchment population for facilities on the Community Facility Hierarchy Model

On the basis of Blessington sitting at Level 2 of the Community Facility Hierarchy Model, a catchment population (both baseline and target) has been calculated for Blessington using discrete units from the CSO Census 2022:

Community Level	Baseline Catchment Population (CSO Census 2022)	Future Catchment Population
2	c. 15,000	c. 17,000

Most demand forecast analysis will use this level 2 catchment population, or in some circumstances the above baseline and likely future populations of the CSO built-up area where facilities are clearly intended for use by the immediate population of the town only.

Separately, catchment populations have been developed for primary and post-primary educational purposes, having regard to the location of schools in the surrounding area. These catchments are as follows:

Education Level	Baseline Catchment Population (CSO Census 2022)	Future Catchment Population
Post-Primary	c. 14,500	c. 16,500
Primary	c. 7,500	c. 9,000



## 2.3 Education & Training

Facilities and services analysed under this section include both primary and post-primary schools, alongside any other relevant training or evening courses available in the area.

### 2.3.1 Primary Schools

In the immediate environs of Blessington are 5 No. primary schools.

Map Label	Name	Capacity	Enrolled	Operating Level	Places Available
P1	Gaelscoil na Lochanna*	240 (480*)	Total: 152 (2023/24)	63.30% (31.67%*)	88 (328*)
P2	St. Mary's Junior National School**	380	Total: 242 (2023/24)	63.68%	138
P3	St. Mary's Senior National School	400	Total: 308 (2023/24)	77.00%	92
P4	Blessington No. 1 National School**	240***	Total: 201 (2023/24)	83.75%	39
P5	Blessington Educate Together	116	Total: 96 (2023/24)	82.76%	20
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,376 (1,616*)</b>	<b>999</b>	<b>72.60% (61.82%*)</b>	<b>377 (617*)</b>

**Source:** Schooldays.ie and direct consultation with schools. Where differing enrolment numbers are provided from either source, the figure provided directly by schools will be used. Figures in brackets are projected based on evidence provided.

\*Gaelscoil na Lochanna has indicated that they will be moving to a new school site on the Kilmalum Road within the plan period, additional expected capacity shown in brackets.

\*\*Blessington No. 1 National School has indicated that, within their capacity of 240 students, some classrooms are individually at capacity.

Within the wider Blessington area within Co. Wicklow, approximately corresponding to a 15minute travel time from the settlement within the county, there are a further 4 No. primary schools in smaller settlements.

Map Label	Name	Capacity	Enrolled	Operating Level	Places Available
P6	St. Bridget's National School Kilbride	120	Total: 104 (2023/24)	86.67%	16
P7	Hollywood National School	170	Total: 143 (2023/24)	84.12%	27
P8	Saint Joseph's National School Vallemount	150	Total: 112 (2023/24)	74.67%	38
P9	Lacken Mixed National School*	144 (of which 24 are in special classes)	Total: 94 (2023/24)	65.27%	50
	<b>Total</b>	<b>584</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>77.57%</b>	<b>131</b>

**Source:** Schooldays.ie and direct consultation with schools.

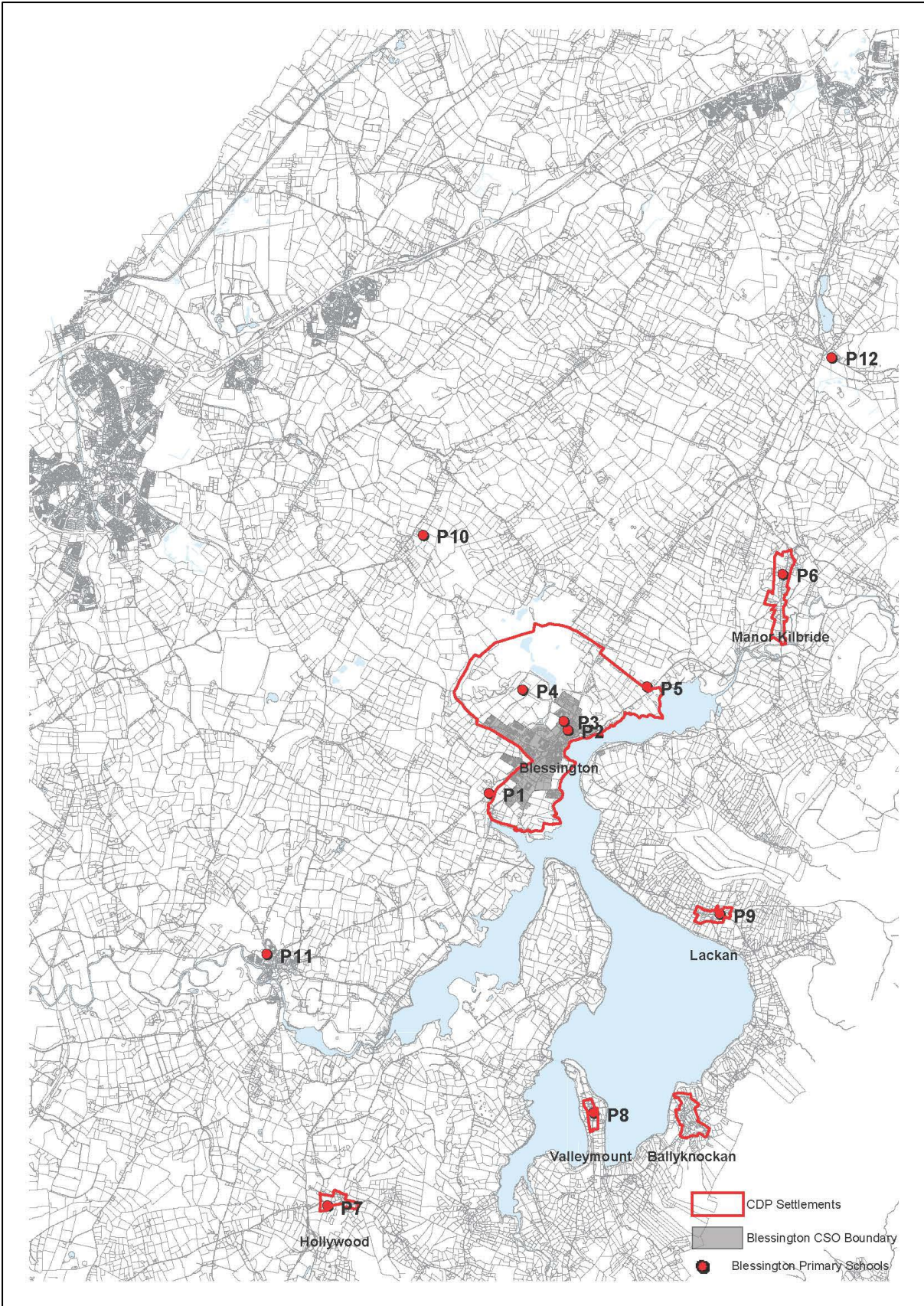
\*Lacken National School note that the capacity for 24 students in special classes is fully enrolled with no additional spaces available.

**Other relevant primary schools:**

A total of 11 No. primary schools are listed as 'feeder schools' by Blessington Community College (in which St. Mary's Junior and Senior National Schools are counted together). Those that are not otherwise listed above are as follows:

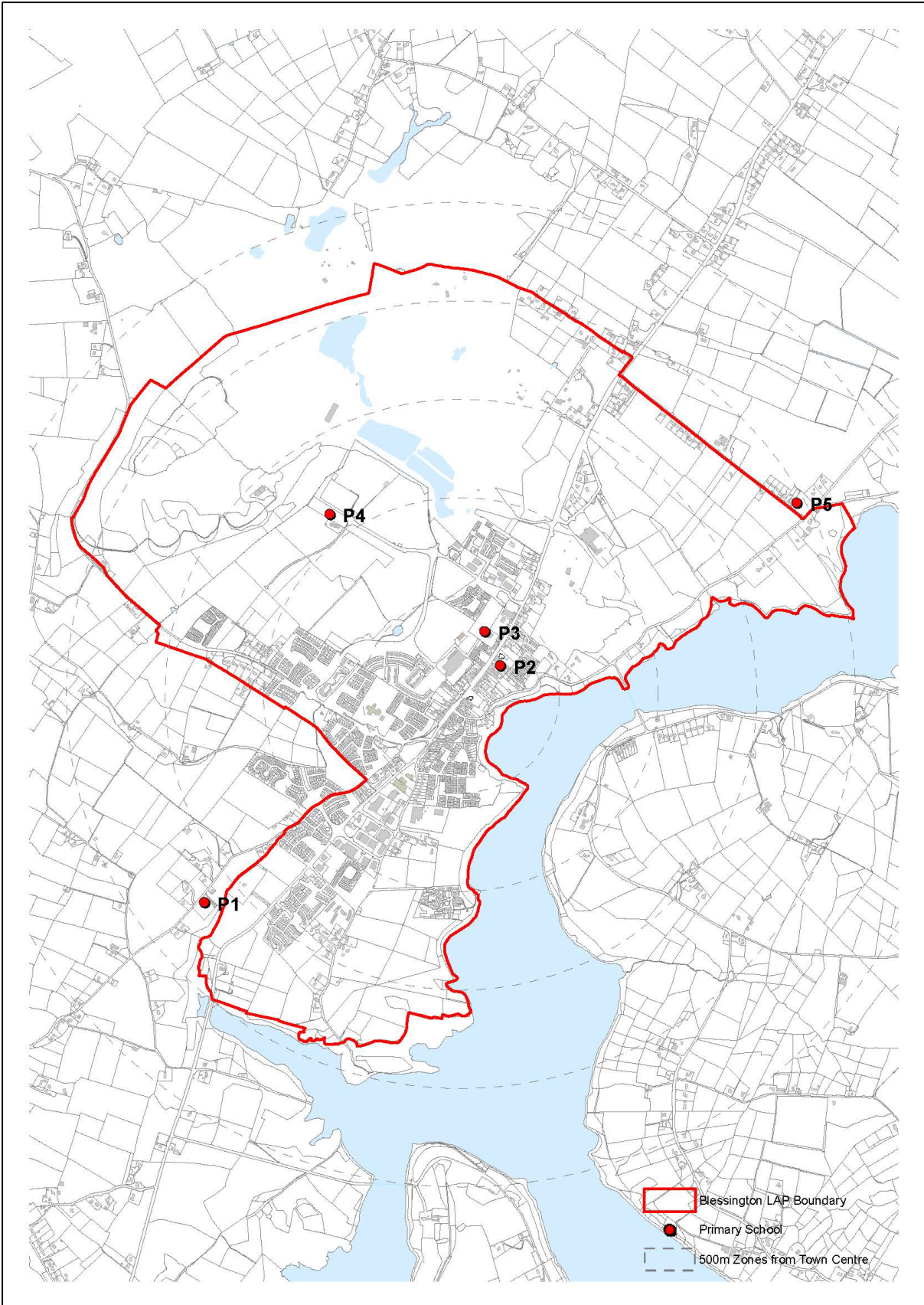
Map Label	Name	Capacity	Enrolled	Operating Level	Places Available
N/A	Rathmore National School	318	Total: 310 (2023/24)	97.48%	8
N/A	Scoil Mhuire, Ballymore Eustace	203	Total: 208 (2023/24)	102.46%	-5
N/A	St Martin's National School, Brittas	111	Total: 85 (2023/24)	76.58%	26
	<b>Total</b>	632	603	95.41%	29

**Source:** Schooldays.ie and direct consultation with schools.



**Figure 2.2:** Primary Schools within the wider Blessington area. Note that the indicated boundary is that of the Blessington Local Area Plan 2013, which may be subject to change.





**Figure 2.3:** Primary Schools around the town of Blessington. Note that the indicated boundary is that of the Blessington Local Area Plan 2013, which may be subject to change.

## Synthesis

It appears that Blessington is currently adequately serviced with primary schools. Currently, the average operating level of schools in Blessington is 72.60%, which will reduce further to 61.82% when permitted upgrades have been carried out. Namely, the construction of the permitted permanent Gaelscoil will substantially increase the capacity of schools in the area. Individually, some schools have higher operating figures. Currently, Blessington No. 1 School has the highest operating level of c. 83.75%.

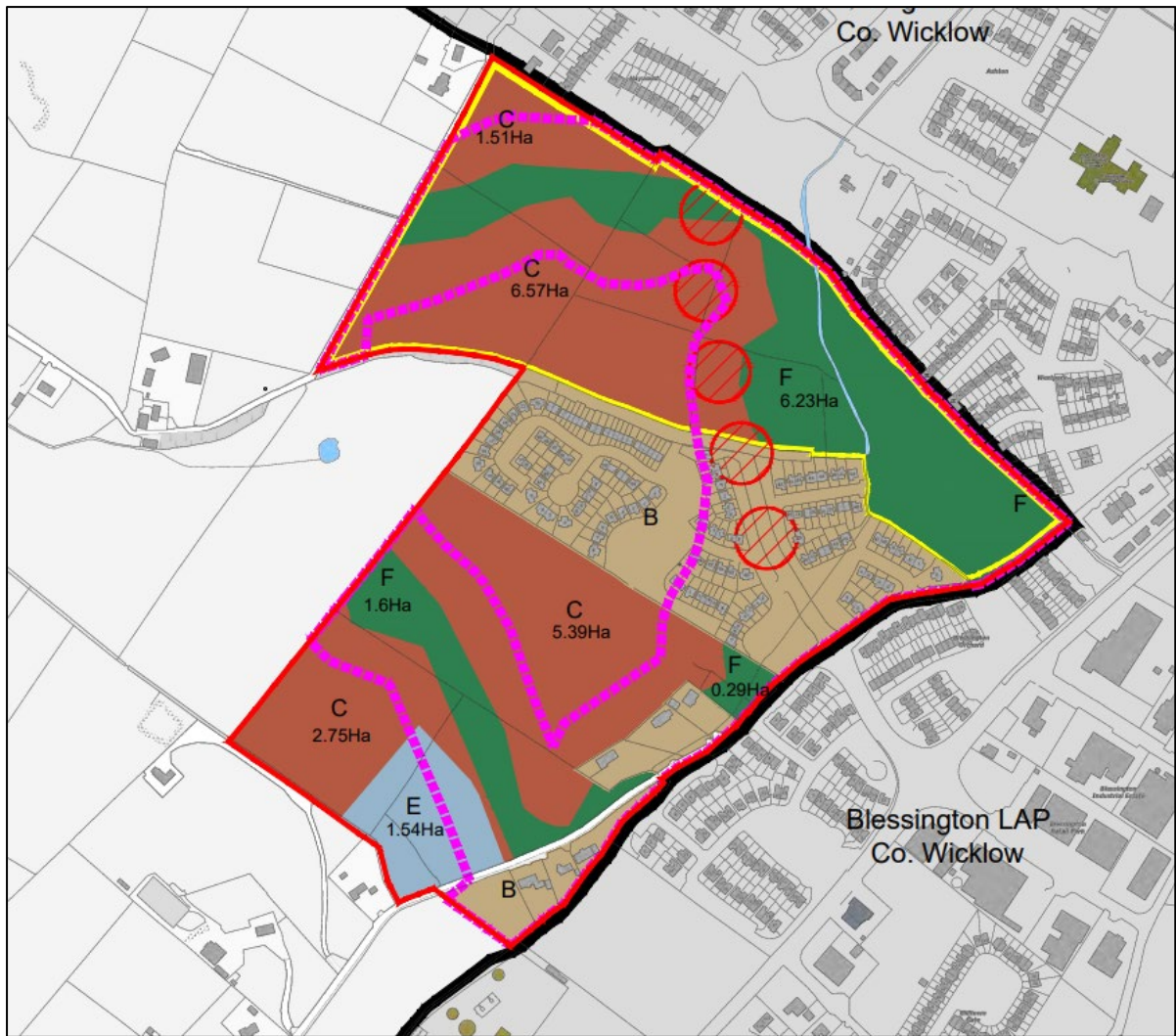
This compares favourably with the situation in other areas of Co. Wicklow. Schools in the wider Blessington area within Co. Wicklow, outside the above primary school catchment area, have similar operating levels to those within the town, with an average of 77.57%. This indicates that it is unlikely that there will be significant spill over effects from schools within Co. Wicklow onto schools within Blessington.

St. Martin's National School in Brittas, Co. Dublin has a comparable operating level to the nearby primary schools in Co. Wicklow; however there is a marked difference in the operating levels of listed Blessington Community College feeder schools within Co. Kildare. Both Rathmore National School and Scoil Mhuire Ballymore Eustace are essentially at capacity. Without further analysis it cannot be stated whether this could be spill over from Naas to surrounding settlements or be via some other mechanism. Regardless, the lack of capacity in these schools could have a spill over effect on Blessington primary schools. However, the 999 students currently enrolled in Blessington primary schools correlates well with the 1,012 primary school age residents (see below) of the Blessington primary school catchment. This could indicate that there is little significant inward commuting of students to Blessington primary schools.

In general, primary schools in the Blessington area are mostly located in close proximity to the town. St. Mary's Senior and Junior schools are both centrally located on Blessington Main Street. Blessington No. 1 School, though immediately adjacent to the GAA grounds and close to the recently completed Sorrel Wood housing development, is more peripheral in comparison to the above mentioned schools, being largely surrounded by land which has been zoned for development that has yet to occur.

In addition, both Gaelscoil na Lochanna and Blessington Educate Together are quite peripheral to the built up area of the town, and indeed both are currently located just outside the boundary of the 2013 LAP. Gaelscoil na Lochanna is also located just across the county boundary into Co. Kildare. While both schools are accessible by footpath, including the recent construction of a footpath on Kilbride Road, the distance may discourage young children from walking.

The current location of Gaelscoil na Lochanna is temporary. The construction of a new primary school is permitted under KCC Reg. Ref. 21/1606, which would bring the school closer to the built up area along Kilmalum Road and includes the development of housing adjacent to the school site. For a more detailed analysis of primary school accessibility, please see the accompanying Blessington Local Transport Assessment.



**Figure 2.4:** Excerpt from Kildare County Development Plan 2023-2029 indicating future location of Gael scoil na Lochanna on a site of 1.54 ha zoned E ‘Community & Education’.

### 2.3.2 Secondary Schools

There is only 1 No. secondary School within the wider Blessington area, including the wider residual ‘Rural Catchment’, namely Blessington Community College on the Naas Road. Otherwise, the closest secondary schools are located in Naas.

Name	Capacity	Enrolled	Operating Level	Places Available
Blessington Community College	624	Total: 702 (2023/24)	100%	0
<b>Total</b>	702	702	100%	0

**Source:** Schooldays.ie and direct consultation with school.

The Department of Education has approved the construction of a new building for Blessington Community College for up to 1,000 students on the existing site, with planning permission granted. The construction of this expanded school would reduce the operating level, based on current enrolment, to 70.2%. However, the current enrolment does not likely represent the total current demand as the school is operating at 100% capacity.

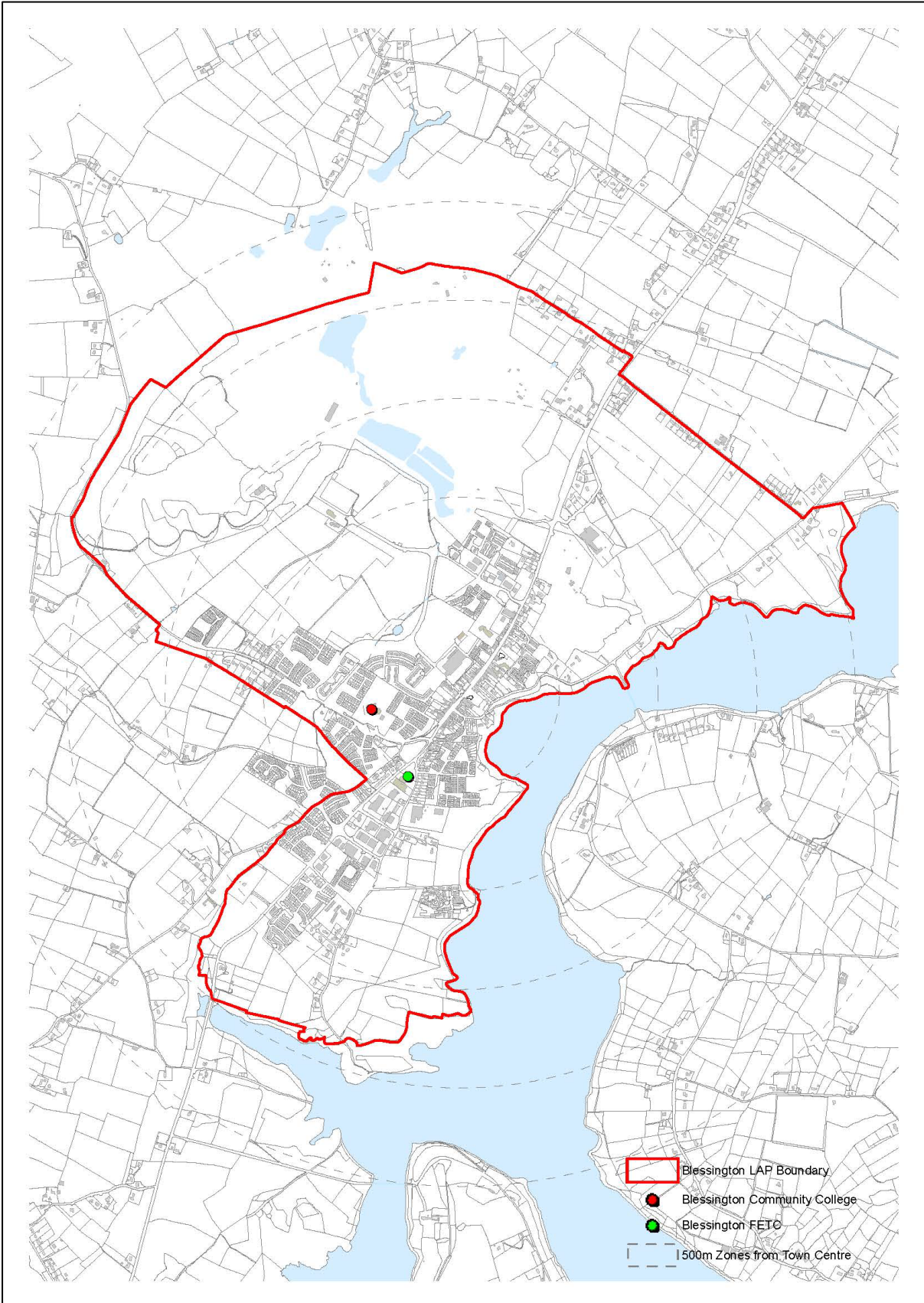
### 2.3.3 Education & Training Services

There is 1 No. Post-Secondary education facility within the Blessington area, namely the Blessington Further Education and Training Centre located in Troopersfield.

Name	Description of Courses	Level of Attainment
Blessington Further Education and Training Centre	Full-time courses in Back to Work Education; Payroll and Bookkeeping; and Youthreach Early School Leaver Education.  Part-time courses in Adult Basic Education; Childcare; Healthcare; Horticulture; Tourism; Business' Office Skills; Information Processing.  Other courses using a Community Education approach.	QQI accredited courses levels 3-6

The 15-minute walking time from the secondary school and the Further Education Centre serves existing residential areas along Naas Road. However, it is recognised that both a secondary school and a further education centre would have a much larger catchment area than walking distance, as shown by the listed feeder schools above, such that it would be unreasonable for students to primarily walk to school.





**Figure 2.5:** Secondary Schools or Further Education Centres in Blessington. Note that the indicated boundary is that of the Blessington Local Area Plan 2013, which may be subject to change.

### 2.3.4 Demand Forecast Analysis for Education Facilities

#### Primary Schools

Detailed demographic breakdown of the population of the various catchments are possible with the census data currently available. This indicates that:

- There are 829 No. residents of the CSO settlement population between the ages of 5-12, i.e. primary school age, which represents c. 14.8% of the total CSO settlement population.
- There are 1,012 No. residents of the primary school catchment area between the ages of 5-12, representing 13.5% of the corresponding total catchment population.

Guidance from the Department of Education & Science indicates that 11.5% of a population would be in need of primary schooling at any one time. Using these assumptions, the following demand would be expected:

- 645 primary school place, considering just the CSO settlement.
- 863 primary school places, considering the primary school catchment.

It appears as though the proportion of residents within each respective age group, as per the CSO Census 2022, is higher than the assumptions provided by the Department of Education, with a resultant higher demand for school places.

The current proportions of primary school age children can be applied to the target populations as follows:

Name	2022 Baseline	2031 Target	Future Primary School Demand (11.5% Department of Education)	Future Primary School Demand (2022 % primary school age)
Blessington CSO Settlement	5,611	7,048	846	1,043 (14.8%)
Blessington Primary School Catchment	c. 7,500	c. 9,000	c. 1,035	c. 1,215 (13.5%)

There are 999 No. children attending primary school in the immediate Blessington area, including the 2 No. primary schools immediately outside the LAP boundary, all within the primary school catchment area.

Notably, this figure of 999 No. students exceeds the Department of Education assumption for the current demand, regardless of whether the assumption is applied to either the CSO settlement itself or the Primary School catchment population. It is also comparable to the Department of Education assumptions for future primary school demand for the CSO settlement.

As the unused capacity of primary schools in Blessington currently stands at 377 No. spaces, the increase of 216 No. students could be accommodated by existing primary schools. Permitted upgrades that are intended to be delivered within the beginning of the plan period will increase the unused capacity to 617 No. spaces, increasing the ability to which the forecasted student population can be accommodated. Much of this additional capacity will be in Gaelscoil na Lochanna, and may attract a wider catchment of students due to its specialised nature.

Future Primary School aged Population within Catchment	Increase in Students from current enrolment	Existing Unused Capacity	Unused Capacity 2031
1,215	216	617*	401*

\*Assuming the delivery of the permitted permanent building for Gaelscoil na Lochanna.

It is considered prudent to not assume the delivery of the permanent Gaelscoil na Lochanna in its permitted location in Co. Kildare, and to zone enough land to allow flexibility in the provision of primary schools, if for any reason the permitted school cannot be delivered on the current permitted site. On that basis, enough lands should be zoned to accommodate an additional 8 to 16 classroom school, i.e. between 1.04 ha and 1.14 ha depending on whether it is to be single storey or two-storey.

### Secondary Schools

Detailed demographic breakdown of the population of the CSO Urban Area/Built-Up Area/Town is possible with the census data currently available. This indicates that:

- There are 603 No. residents of the CSO settlement between the ages of 13-18, i.e. post-primary school age, which represents c. 10.7% of the settlement population.
- There are 1,365 No. residents of the post-primary school catchment area between the ages 13-18, representing 9.4% of the corresponding total catchment population.

Guidance from the Department of Education & Science indicates that 7.5% of a population would be in need of secondary schooling at any one time. Using these assumptions, the following demand would be expected:

- 421 secondary school places, considering just the CSO settlement.
- 1,088 post-primary school places, considering the post-primary school catchment.

It appears as though the proportion of residents within each respective age group, as per the CSO Census 2022, is higher than the assumptions provided by the Department of Education, with a resultant higher demand for school places.

The current proportions of post-primary school age children can be applied to the target populations as follows:

<b>Name of Catchment</b>	<b>2022 Baseline</b>	<b>2031 Target</b>	<b>Future Post-Primary School Demand (7.5% Department of Education)</b>	<b>Future Post-Primary School Demand (2022 %)</b>
Blessington CSO Settlement	5,611	7,048	529	754 (10.7%)
Blessington Post-Primary School Catchment	c.14,500	c. 16,500	1,238	1,551 (9.4%)

There are 702 No. students currently attending secondary school in schools located in Blessington, i.e. Blessington Community College, which is operating at 100% of available capacity.

Notably, this figure of 702 No. students exceeds the Department of Education ratio when applied to the current CSO settlement population. It is below the Department of Education assumptions for the post-primary catchment area. However, as the school is operating at capacity it is possible that current demand already exceeds this assumed figure, based on the number of residents within the post-primary school catchment of secondary school age.

As the unused capacity of post-primary schools in Blessington currently stands at 0 No. spaces, the future increase represented by any of the above future post-primary pupil numbers, cannot be accommodated by existing secondary school infrastructure.

The planned expansion of Blessington Community College to accommodate 1,000 No. students would significantly increase capacity for post-primary schooling.

<b>Future Post-Primary School aged Population within Catchment</b>	<b>Increase in Students from current enrolment</b>	<b>Existing Unused Capacity</b>	<b>Unused Capacity 2031</b>
1,551	849	298*	-551*

*\*assuming the expansion of Blessington Community College occurs within the plan period.*

It appears, even assuming the successful expansion of Blessington Community College, that the future demand in the post-primary catchment area would not be accommodated in existing/planned post-primary education infrastructure.

A comparison can be made between the shortfall of 521 students and Table 1 'School Site Area Analysis' from Technical Guidance document TGD-027 'Identification and Suitability Assessment of Sites for Post Primary Schools' (Revision 1). This shortfall could approximately be accommodated within a 500 No. pupil school, which would require a site of at least 3.13 ha.

However, the above analysis would indicate that such a school would be immediately at capacity. To future proof such a site, a larger site which could also accommodate a larger 750 No. or 1,000 No. pupil school should be provided. This would require a site of at least 4.5ha, or 3.5ha where playing fields are located in close proximity (See Diagram 1 of TGD-027), which shall be provided for in this plan.

#### Further Education Centres

There is no guidance available on the provision for further education centres or post-secondary education on a per capita basis. However, the current site of the Blessington Further Education and Training Centre is suitable for intensification of activity if the training centre is required to increase its capacity.

#### **Recommendations:**

Policy support for the continued expansion of secondary school facilities (both existing and new) should be included in the Local Area Plan written statement.

The accompanying Blessington Local Transport Assessment has indicated that areas to the west of the existing built-up area, in the townland of Blessington Demesne, are suitable locations for the provision of educational facilities, both primary and post-primary. The Blessington Local Area Plan 2013 included lands zoned for Community & Education (CE) uses in these areas. Sufficient lands zoned Community & Education (CE) should be provided to accommodate the anticipated demand for additional education facilities.

<b>Suggested Blessington LAP Policy</b>	To facilitate the provision of schools on lands zoned Community and Education (CE) and to consider the provision of schools on any land use zoning, excluding OS1 and OS2 zones, where it is in line with the County Development Plan, this Local Area Plan, relevant planning guidelines (including the Department of Education guidelines) and proper planning and development.
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## 2.4 Childcare

### 2.4.1 Audit of Existing Childcare Facilities

In the Blessington area, within or immediately adjacent to the built-up area, there are 2 No. childcare facilities offering full-time early years services:

Map Label	Name	Capacity
C1	Cocoon Childcare	145
C2	Sakura Montessori, Naíonra and & Afterschool	52
	<b>Total</b>	197

In addition to this, there are 2 No. childcare facilities offering part-time or sessional early years services:

Map Label	Name	Capacity
C3	Bláth na hÓige Montessori	51
C4	Happy Faces Community Playschool	22
	<b>Total</b>	73

Figures obtained from the Wicklow Childcare Committee indicate that in 2023 there were 4 No. sessional spaces and 2 No. full time spaces available in Blessington. This would indicate that of the 197 No. full time spaces, 195 No. were occupied, giving an operating rate of 98.98%. Similarly, this would indicate that of the 73 No. sessional spaces, 69 No. were occupied, giving an operating rate of 94.52%. Wicklow Childcare Committee stated that it was entirely possible that this small number of available spaces has been taken up since their survey. It is clear that early years childcare facilities in Blessington are essentially at capacity.

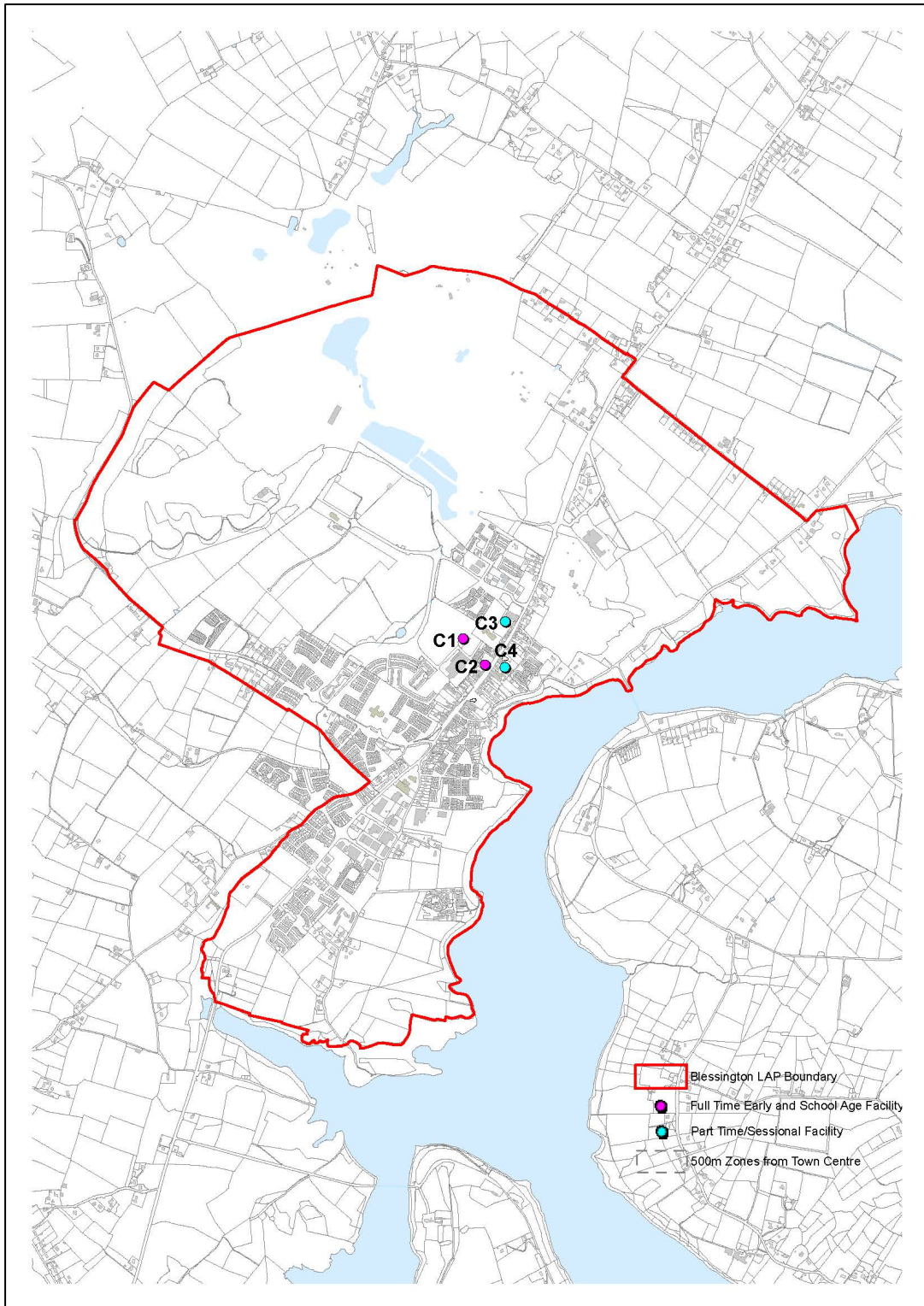
There are 2 No. childcare facilities offering school-age services. Please note that some of these services may be co-located with some of the early years facilities listed above.

Map Label	Name	Capacity
C1	Cocoon Childcare Blessington	36
C2	Sakura Montessori	40
	<b>Total</b>	76

In direct consultation, Cocoon Childcare indicated a total enrolment of 140 children. A breakdown between early years and school age services was not available. However, considering the enrolment levels for early years services indicated by the Wicklow County Childcare Committee, it is unlikely that significant capacity for additional school age spaces is available.

Figure 2.10 below indicates that existing childcare facilities are clustered toward the northern end of Blessington Main Street. While this is a central, accessible location for these facilities, this could leave other residential areas potentially outside of the walking distance of a parent and young child. However, large sites zoned for new residential development will likely be required to provide childcare facilities as part of the development management process. This will improve the coverage of childcare facilities to the existing built-up area to the southeast and northwest of the settlement (i.e. permitted childcare facilities in Burgage More, and under construction facilities in Sorrel Wood).





**Figure 2.6:** Childcare facilities within Blessington. Note that the indicated boundary is that of the Blessington Local Area Plan 2013, which may be subject to change.

## 2.4.2 Demand Forecast Analysis for Childcare Facilities

The Section 28 Guidelines 'Childcare Facilities – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, June 2001' sets out that, in general, there should be a childcare facility provided for every 75 new dwellings, of a minimum of 20 spaces.

It is assumed here that this standard of childcare facility spaces will be provided in the development of new residential areas through the development management process (e.g. a childcare facility is permitted in Burgage More, and under construction in Sorrel Wood), such that the future demand for childcare from these areas will be met. The same standard can also be applied to existing residential areas to gauge whether the existing childcare capacity meets the needs of the existing, not future, population.

Geodirectory records from Q3 2022 indicate that there are 1,932 residential properties within the Blessington 2013 LAP boundary, noting that this may be subject to change. This figure does not account for under construction/recently completed units at Sorrel Wood, etc. Applying the standard set out in 'Childcare Facilities – Guidelines for Planning Authorities, June 2001' would result in requiring approximately 26 facilities of 20 spaces each, i.e. 520 childcare spaces.

The existing capacity of 346 No. childcare spaces (including both full time and sessional spaces) would indicate that current service provision is not adequate to cater for current demand, with a shortfall of 174 no. childcare spaces.

Furthermore, the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 states that there is capacity for the development 300 No. residential units within the built-up area of Blessington. While some of these sites may result in residential developments large enough to require the provision of childcare facilities, many will consist of infill developments of fewer than 75 No. units. Although infill developments of (generally) over 50 residential units may be required to carry out social infrastructure audits, which may lead to the provision of additional childcare units within the built up area, a precautionary approach will be taken of assuming that no childcare facilities will be provided as part of infill development. On this basis, a further 80 No. childcare spaces would be required. This will increase the projected shortfall to 254 No. spaces.

### **Recommendation:**

It is clear that childcare is essentially at capacity in the Blessington area. While greenfield residential development in the town will be provided with childcare facilities via the development management process, existing unmet demand and the demand created by smaller scale infill development will not be accommodated. Furthermore, it is clear that there is a lack of physical childcare facilities, not just childcare operators, as evidenced by the co-location of childcare facilities in community halls and further education centres, which could cause knock-on capacity issues.

On this basis, policy objectives should be included to ensure the delivery of further physical childcare facilities beyond that required as part of large residential developments, and particularly as part of the development of future educational facilities, as follows:

#### **Suggested Blessington LAP Policy**

To facilitate and support the provision of new childcare facilities in a manner, which is compatible with land-use and transportation policies and adheres to the principles of sustainable development.

To facilitate and encourage the co-location of childcare facilities with other educational facilities such as schools. Applications for the development of new educational facilities, or the significant redevelopment or extensions of existing facilities, should consider the provision of co-located childcare facilities within the development.



## 2.5 Health

### 2.5.1 Audit of Existing Health Facilities

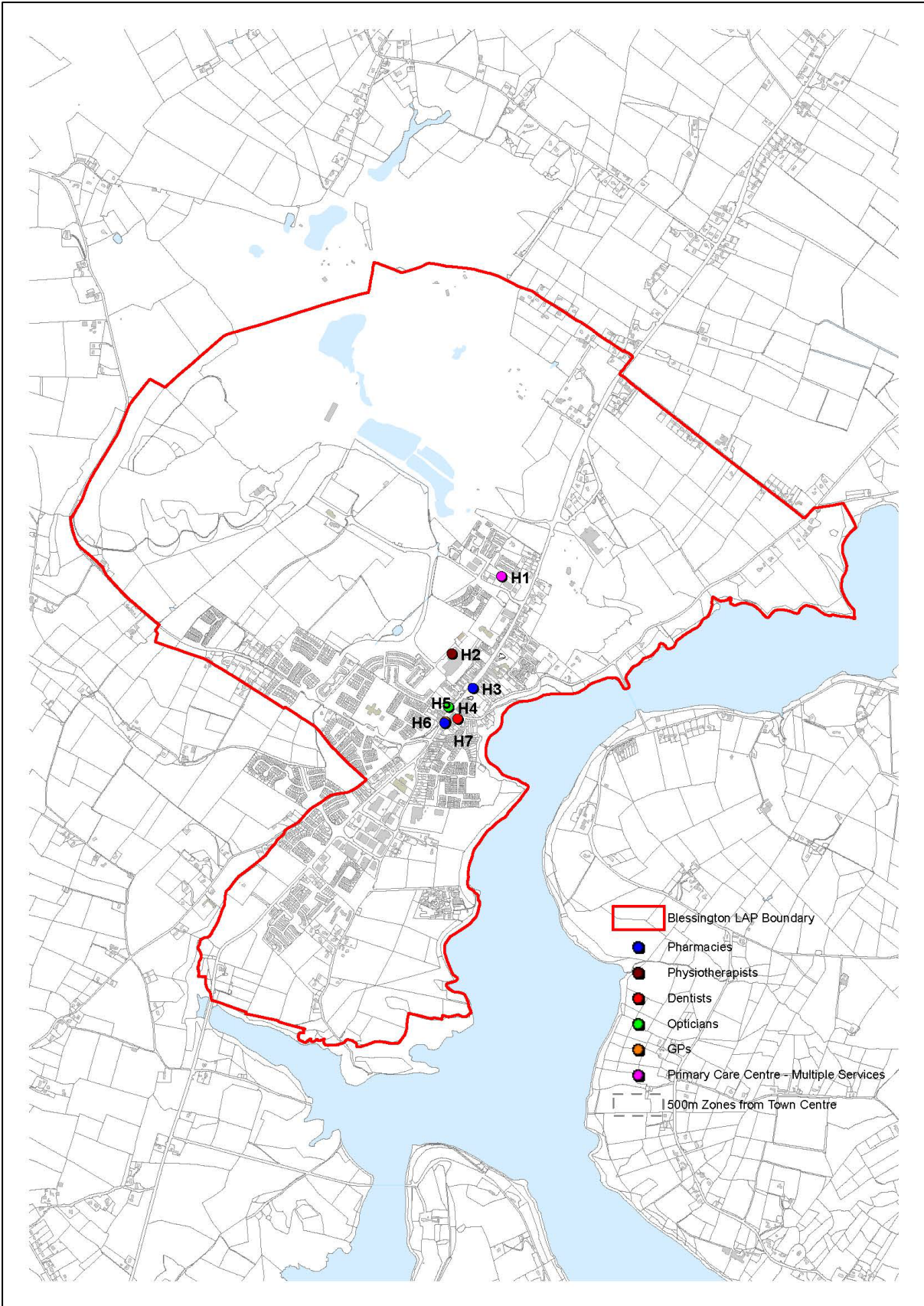
There were 10 No. establishments related to health services within the Blessington LAP boundary, as follows:

Map label	Name/Location	Service Provided
H1	Blessington Primary Care Centre: HSE Services	Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Dentist (school-age only), Public Health Nursing, Home Care Assessment, Wound Management Clinic.
H1	Blessington Primary Care Centre: Centric Health	GP x 4
H1	Blessington Primary Care Centre: Hermitage Medical Clinic	Consultant Clinic
H1	Blessington Primary Care Centre: McGreal's Pharmacy	Pharmacy, including Optician and Audiology services
H3	McGreal's Pharmacy, Blessington Main Street	Pharmacy
H7	McGreal's Pharmacy, Blessington Main Street	Pharmacy
H6	Blessington Family Practise	GP x 4
H4	Rods & Cones Eyecare	Optician
H5	Blessington Dental	Dentist
H2	Method Physio	Physiotherapy

Health infrastructure in the Blessington area displays a natural concentration at the primary care centre, north of the town centre, due to the co-location of multiple services at this location. Otherwise, services are largely concentrated towards the south of Blessington Main Street, where facilities generally (but not exclusively) pre-date the development of the Primary Care Centre. The southern cluster is within a reasonable walking distance of existing residential areas both east and west (within the Blessington Relief Road) of the town centre.

Of note is the lack of nursing home facilities within the 2013 LAP boundary. However, there are existing planning permissions for 2 No. nursing homes that have not commenced construction to date<sup>3</sup>, both of which are located within or immediately adjacent to the town centre of Blessington. This will result in a total of 224 No. bed spaces if both permissions are successfully developed.

<sup>3</sup> WCC Reg. Ref. 20/184 (120 No. bed spaces) and WCC Reg. Ref. 19/940 (104 No. bed spaces)



**Figure 2.7:** Healthcare facilities within Blessington. Note that the indicated boundary is that of the Blessington Local Area Plan 2013, which may be subject to change.

## 2.5.2 Demand Forecast Analysis for Health Facilities

### General Practitioner (GP) Services:

There are no quantitative standards for the provision of GPs on a per capita basis. However, HSE publications on medical workforce projection may allow an analysis of the current and projected provision of GPs in Blessington.

The HSE document 'Medical Workforce Planning: Future Demand for General Practitioners 2015-2025' includes the following figures/assumptions:

- Where no financial barriers apply, the average number of GP visits per person in 2025 would be approximately 3.57 No. visits
- Were the ratio of GPs to visits in 2015 to be maintained to 2025, 0.27 GPs per 1,000 visits would be required.

As much off the surrounding area (e.g. Valleymount, Manor Kilbride) lack GP services, applying these ratios to the baseline and projected population of Blessington (Level 2 Catchment) gives the following:

<b>Blessington</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Estimated Visits</b>	<b>Required GPs</b>
Baseline Level 2	15,000	53,550	14.5
Target Level 2	17,000	60,690	16.4

On the basis of the above, c. 14 GPs would be required to meet the current demand (possibly reflecting the capacity issues currently experienced), and c. 16 GPs would be required to meet target demand.

Publicly available information indicates that there approximately 8 GPs practising within the Blessington area. This indicates that Blessington is not adequately served by GP services, and that there is a need to expand current GP services in the town.

### Primary Care Centres:

The HSE consider a primary care centre to service a population of between 10,000-20,000 persons. On this basis, the primary care centre in Blessington is sufficient to serve the projected population of the level 2 catchment.

### Nursing Homes:

There are no quantitative standards for the provision of nursing homes on a per capita basis. If the 224 No. nursing home beds with planning permission were delivered successfully, this would theoretically accommodate 32.65% of all those who would be over the age of 65 years in the CSO settlement of Blessington in the target population, on the assumption that the current proportion of those over 65 years remains constant. Nursing homes are not listed on the Community Facilities Hierarchy Model; however a comparison with the various catchments indicates that the permitted nursing home beds, if delivered, would still account for 9.24% of the population over 65 years in the target Level 2 catchment. It is worth noting however that the proportion of the population over the age of 65 years is likely to increase over time as the population ages.

Catchment Level	Current Population 65+	% of current population 65+	Target population 65+ at current %	Permitted Beds as % of target 65+ population
CSO Settlement	546	9.73	686	32.65
Level 2	2,124	14.25	2,423	9.24

**Recommendation:**

Quantitative standards indicate that there is a need for further GP services in Blessington. Policy objectives should be included to support both the expansion of existing facilities and the provision of new facilities in accessible locations.

Policy objectives should be further included to support the expansion, where necessary, of Blessington Primary Care Centre in its current location.

With respect to nursing homes, it is considered that there are sufficient infill sites within the town centre to facilitate the development of either the currently permitted nursing homes or any additional facilities where required.

These recommendations will be integrated as policies into the local area plan as follows:

<b>Suggested Blessington LAP Policy</b>	To facilitate and encourage the continued operation of existing and development of new care and health related facilities, including (but not limited to) primary care centres, general practitioners surgeries, care / nursing homes and respite / hospice centres facilities particularly within the built-up area of Blessington.
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## 2.6 Faith

### 2.6.1 Audit of Existing Faith Facilities

There have been 3 No. religious facilities identified within the Blessington LAP boundary, as follows:

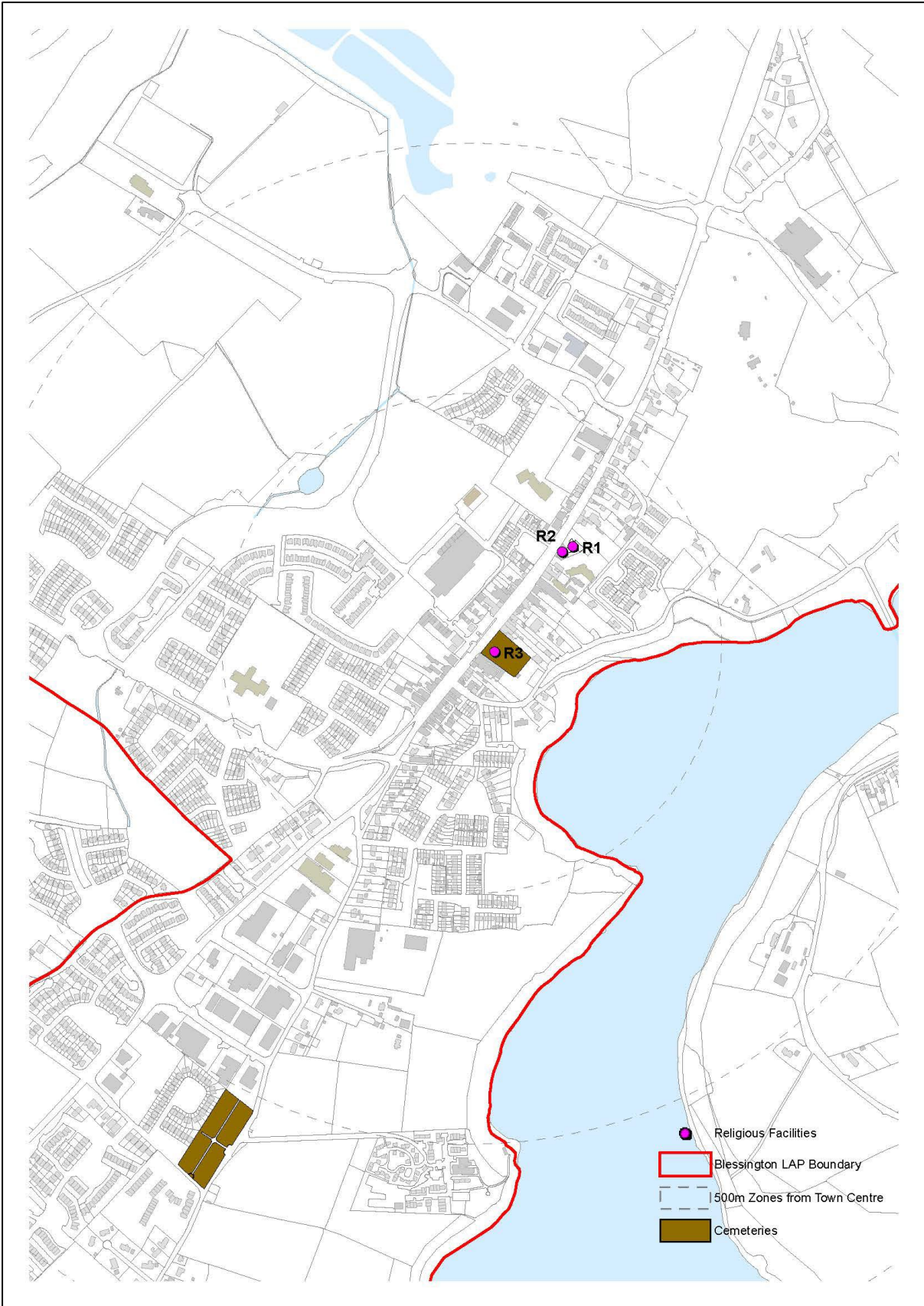
Map Label	Name	Description
R1	Church of Our Lady	Catholic Church
R2	Coimín Centre	Catholic Parish Hall & Office
R3	St. Mary's Church of Ireland	Church of Ireland

In addition to the above, there are 2 No. active graveyards within the Blessington LAP 2013 boundary. Note that the following list does not include inactive historic graveyards such as Scurlock's Graveyard on Red lane.

Map Label	Name	Description
N/A	Burgage Cemetery	c. 61 No. plots remaining
N/A	St. Mary's Churchyard	c. 0 No. plots remaining

With the exception of Burgage Cemetery, all religious facilities in Blessington are located within a short distance of one another on Blessington Main Street. While the religious facilities may not be within walking distance of peripheral areas of Blessington, the Main Street remains a central and accessible location for such facilities which likely have a wider catchment area than their immediate surroundings. A short distance north of the 2013 LAP boundary in Co. Kildare is a further Catholic Church within the parish of Blessington, namely the Church of Our Lady of Mercy, Crosschapel.





**Figure 2.8:** Religious Facilities located within Blessington. Note that the indicated boundary is that of the Blessington Local Area Plan 2013, which may be subject to change.

## 2.6.2 Faith Facilities Demand Forecast Analysis.

There are no quantitative standards for the provision of churches and other faith-based facilities.

In terms of cemeteries and burial spaces, direct consultation with stakeholders has indicated the following:

- St. Mary's Churchyard is essentially at capacity, having been in operation within the confines of the churchyard for over three centuries. However, occasionally legacy burials do take place, e.g. cremated burials in family plots.
- Burgage Cemetery recently extended the burial area within the site along the western boundary, allowing the creation of an additional c. 70 No. number plots, of which 9 No. have been used. Records provided indicate that there have been approximately 29.5 No. burials per year over the last few years. On that basis, the additional burial plots within Burgage Cemetery would be filled within the plan period. In general, each new plot could accommodate 3 No. related burials, i.e. 210 burials. On average, 9 No. new plots are opened per year.

The average of 9 No. new plots per year indicates that the 61 remaining new plots would be allocated (if not necessarily full) shortly after the end of the upcoming LAP period.

The indicated average number of burials per year would represent 1.96 burials per 1,000 persons in relation to the level 2 catchment baseline population of c. 15,000 No. persons in the wider area of Blessington.

Applying that per capita ratio of burials to the target level 2 catchment population of c. 17,000 No. persons would result in approximately 34.5 burials per year at the end of the plan period. Assuming a linear increase across the forecast period, this would result in a demand for approximately 283.2 No. burial spaces. This represents a projected shortfall of c. 73 No. burials in relation to the additional plots created recently in Burgage cemetery. While capacity exists in older plots in Burgage Cemetery, consultation has indicated that many of these are nearing capacity.

While the information on exact capacity in existing plots is not available, the rate of new plot usage (which may increase over the plan period as older plots reach capacity) indicates that by the end of the LAP period it will be difficult for someone without an existing family plot to acquire a burial plot in Burgage cemetery.

On the basis of the existing cemeteries either being used for legacy burials only or rapidly approaching capacity, there is a clear need for additional cemetery space within Blessington. This need was recognised in the Blessington LAP 2013 with the provision of 0.8 ha of Community & Education (CE) zoned land across from the existing cemetery, however the lands dedicated for that purpose remain undeveloped.

### **Recommendation:**

CPO 7.55 of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 states the following:

*'To facilitate the development of new, improved or expanded places of worship and burial grounds including natural burial grounds at appropriate locations in the County, where the demand for the facility has been demonstrated.'*

This objective will apply directly in the Blessington plan area and surrounds, and therefore it is not considered necessary to restate this objective in the Blessington Local Area Plan, noting that the above objective does not require burial grounds to be developed within the built up area of a settlement. Locations in the vicinity of Blessington, including possibly outside the LAP boundary, may also be suitable for additional burial grounds.



## **2.7 Sport, Recreation & Open Space**

### **2.7.1 Audit of Existing Sport, Recreation & Open Space Facilities**

A variety of sport and recreation clubs and facilities have been identified within the Blessington area.

Furthermore, it is recognised that a significant number of sports clubs based in Blessington have their facilities beyond the LAP boundary in the surrounding rural area. While the location of some clubs outside the settlement may be necessary, e.g. for suitable lake access, others may find their peripheral location a detriment to access to facilities.

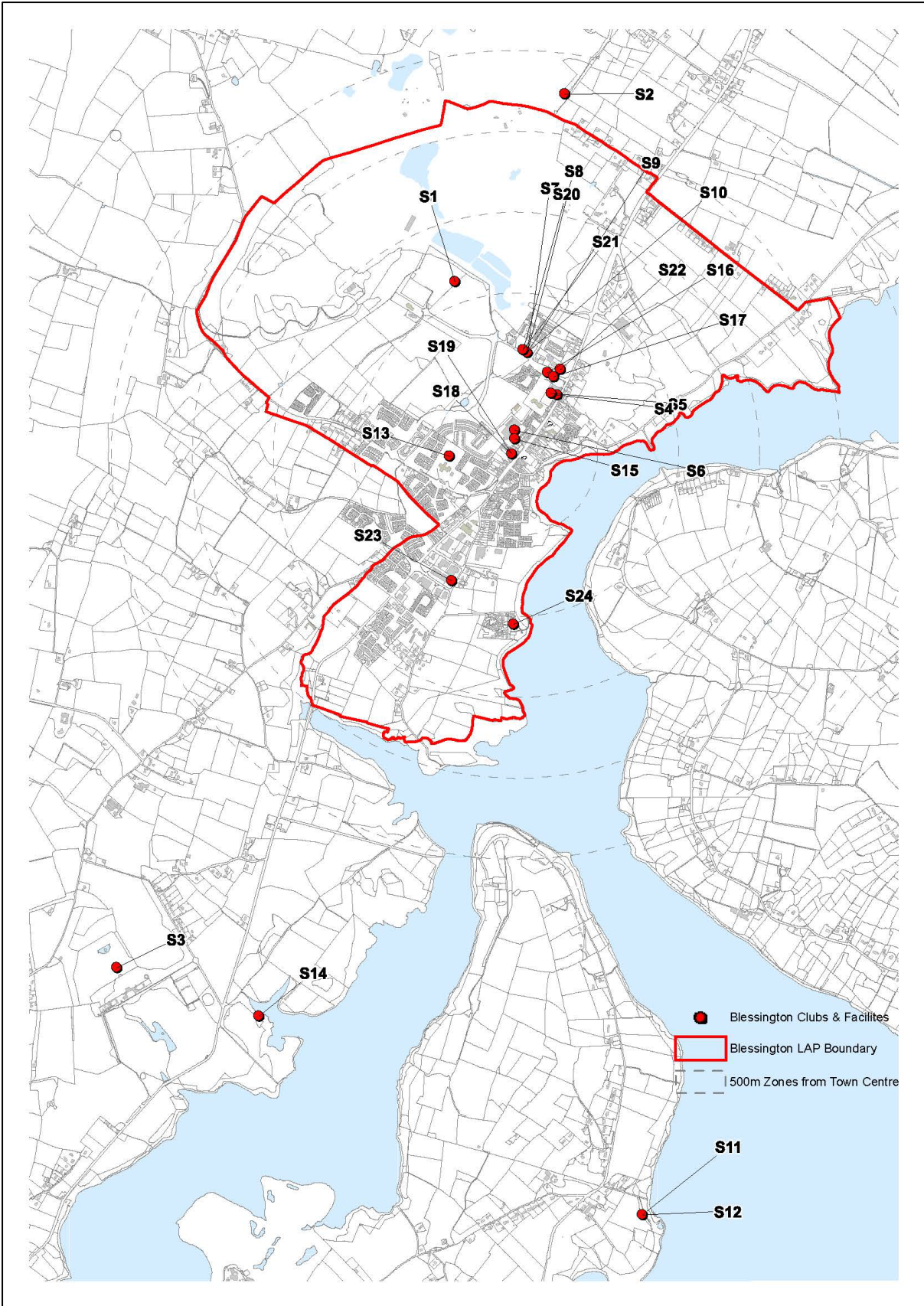
#### **Sports Clubs & Facilities:**

The clubs/facilities within the area are listed below. Where a club operates from a facility shared among multiple users, this location is listed.

Aside from sports clubs and free facilities, there also exist a number of commercial enterprises (fitness centres, etc.) that could broadly be considered under the heading of sport and recreation. These frequently provide facilities to multiple sports clubs and are included in the list below.

Map Label	Name	Description/Location	Type
S1	Blessington GAA	3x full size pitches, 1 reduced size astroturf pitch	Sports Club
S2	Blessington Association Football Club	2x full size pitches, 1 reduced size/multi-use pitch	Sports Club
S3	Blessington Rugby Football Club	Operates from Russborough House playing fields	Sports Clubs
S4	Blessington Boxing Club	Club house on Blessington Main Street	Sports Club
S5	Blessington Fencing Club	Operates from St. Kevin's Hall	Sports Club
S6	Blessington Martial Arts	Operates from Dance Trax studios	Sports Club
S7	Fight Fit Dojo	Martial Arts, Fitness and Wellness Centre	Sports Club
S8	Blessington Kempo Karate Club	Operating from Fight Fit Dojo	Sports Club
S9	Blessington Jiu Jitsu Club	Operating from Fight Fit Dojo	Sports Club
S10	Blessington Tae Kwon Do Club	Operating from Fight Fit Dojo	Sports Club
S11	Blessington Sailing Club	Clubhouse and 1.4 ha site in Baltyboys	Sports Club
S12	8 <sup>th</sup> Wicklow Blessington Scouts	Operating from Blessington Sailing Club	Outdoor Activity Club
N/A	Lakeside Community Games	Operates from multiple locations	Sports Club
S13	Lakeshore Striders	Operates from Blessington Community College (track to rear)	Sports Club
S14	Poulaphouca Paddlers	Operates from Russelstown Bay	Sports Club
S15	Reservoir Cogs Cycling Club	Meeting point in Blessington town centre	Sports Club
S16	Blessington Playground	Playground of approx. 0.06ha	Free Facility
S17	Blessington Skatepark	Skatepark of approx. 0.03 ha	Free Facility
S18	Blessington Fitness Hub	Operating from Civic Building	Martial Arts Centre
S19	Mac Sports Recovery	Operating from Civic Building	Fitness Centre
S20	Crossfit Tua	Blessington Business Park	Fitness Centre
S21	SWEAT Fitness Studio	Blessington Business Park	Fitness Centre
S22	High Definition Fitness	Blessington Business Park	Fitness Centre
S23	All in Fitness	Blessington Industrial Estate	Fitness Centre
S24	The Avon	Resort and Leisure Centre with water and land activities in Burgage More	Resort

**DISCLAIMER NOTE** – Note that the listing of any facility in the above list does not infer that the users of said facilities are being adequately served by current facility location/size/condition. This list is not exhaustive.



**Figure 2.9:** Existing Sports Clubs in the vicinity of Blessington. Note that the indicated boundary is that of the Blessington Local Area Plan 2013, which may be subject to change.

Several are co-located or make use of a facility operated by another club, leading to clustering within the settlement. Blessington Community College has indicated that fitness clubs and summer camps make use of its facilities outside of school hours.

Notably, there is a significant cluster of facilities within Blessington Industrial Estate in the north of the town. There is a pattern of industrial units within the estate being converted into commercial fitness studios/centres in close proximity to one another. As fitness studios in the area coordinate or allow the use of their space by a variety of sports and Martial Arts clubs, there is a path dependency of a similar clustering of a large number of sports clubs within Blessington Industrial Estate. This clustering to the north of the town is distant from existing residential areas (although ultimately only 1.5km from the centre of the town). The road layout along Oak Drive and within the industrial estate is not easily conducive to active travel, due to the lack of cycle lanes, shared on-road vehicular/pedestrian entrances and the co-location of industrial uses, with accompanying traffic movements, with the fitness centres. Blessington Playground and Skate Park are also accessed off Oak Drive, though with additional pedestrian access through Aldi onto Blessington Main Street.

### **Open Space:**

Section 8.0 of Appendix 1 (Development and Design Standards) of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 categorises open space as follows:

- Outdoor Play Space (pitches, courts, sports grounds)
- Casual Play Spaces (parks)
- Equipped Play Space

Further classifications of open space are made in terms of whether open space is a 'neighbourhood park' or whether it consists of residential public open space.

An audit of the existing open space (as zoned in the LAP 2013 for that use) within Blessington indicates that the following is in use or under construction:

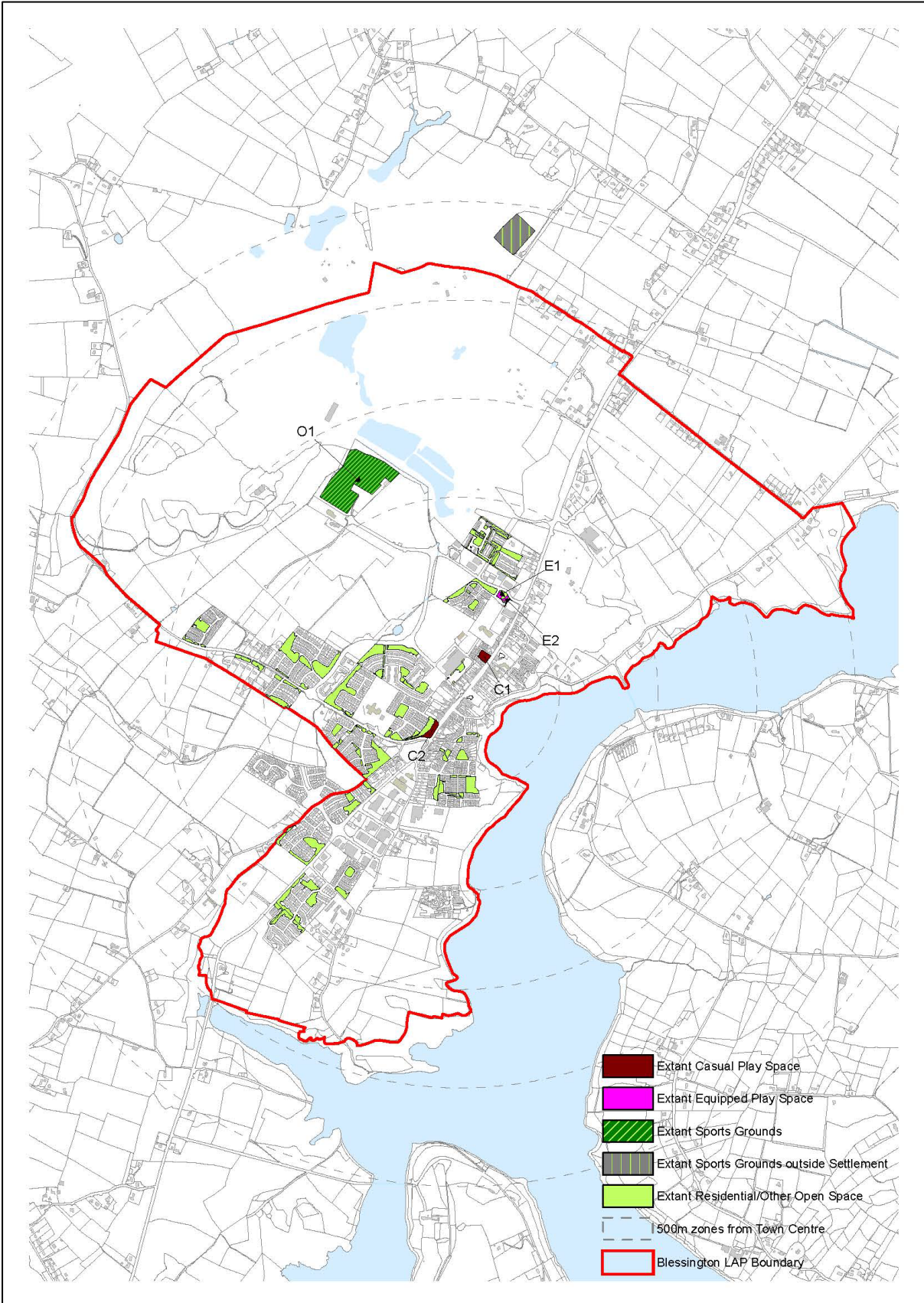
<b>Map Label</b>	<b>Name/Description</b>	<b>Open Space Type</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>
O1	Blessington GAA Grounds	Outdoor Play Space	7.9
O2	Bowling Green/Tennis Courts/Informal Playing Pitch (under construction)	Outdoor Play Space	0.82
C1	St. Josephs Road	Casual Play Space (parks)	0.23
C2	Dempsey's Lane	Casual Play Space (parks)	0.31
C3	New Town Park (2.66ha under construction)	Casual Play Space (parks)	3.61*
E1	Blessington Playground	Equipped Play Space	0.06
E2	Blessington Skatepark & Outdoor Gym	Equipped Play Space	0.03
E3	New Town Park Playground (under construction)	Equipped Play Space	0.08

*\*This figure represents the stated size of 2.66 ha of the Town Park under WCC. Reg. Ref. 20/1146 and the area described under WCC Reg. Ref. 22/1191 as active open space but consisting of general landscaped areas.*

The total existing area of open space types are as follows:

<b>Open Space Type</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>
Outdoor Play Space	8.72
Casual Play Space (as zoned for such purposes)	4.15
Equipped Play Space	0.17





**Figure 2.10:** Existing open space and recreation grounds in the vicinity of Blessington (under construction Town Park not shown). Note that the indicated boundary is that of the Blessington Local Area Plan 2013, which may be subject to change.

### **'Assessment of Community and Recreational Needs of Baltinglass Municipal District':**

In February 2023, Wicklow County Council published a commissioned report into the community and recreational needs of the Baltinglass Municipal District. This report focuses on a much wider area than Blessington. However, a significant number of responses (48.65%) were received from Blessington residents, which could provide insight.

Of the issues identified by respondents in public consultation:

- Deficit of community facilities in general was the top ranked weakness raised.
- The lack of a public swimming pool in Blessington was the second most raised weakness.
- The lack of a football field in Blessington for Blessington AFC was the third most raised weakness (alongside deficits of facilities at their existing ground).

The report recommended the following in relation to Blessington (alongside a variety of general recommendations):

- Increase the capacity of existing facilities where required as most facilities are struggling to cope with increased population and usage. [General recommendation]
- Develop a new large multipurpose sports and community centre strategically located in Municipal District. [location not specified]
- Develop a playing pitch and facilities at Blessington AFC Soccer Club in Blessington.
- Develop a community / public permanent swimming pool in the area [location not specified]

## 2.7.2 Demand Forecast Analysis for Sport, Recreation & Open Space Facilities

Section 8.1 of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 Development Management Standards states the following in relation to active open space:

- *In accordance with the Planning Authority's Active Open Space Policy, active open space shall be required as a rate of 2.4ha per 1,000 population divided into:*
  - *1.6ha outdoor play space (pitches, courts, sports grounds)*
  - *0.6ha casual play spaces (parks)*
  - *0.2ha equipped play space (playgrounds and MUGAs)*

### Outdoor Play Space:

Required Outdoor Play Space	Level 2 Catchment Baseline Population	Current Demand (ha)	Level 2 Catchment Future Population	Future Demand (ha)
1.6 ha per 1,000 population	c. 15,000	24	c. 17,000	27.2

### Casual Play Space (parks):

Required Casual Play Space	Level 2 Catchment Baseline Population	Current Demand (ha)	Level 2 Catchment Future Population	Future Demand (ha)
0.6 ha per 1,000 population	c. 15,000	9	c. 17,000	10.2

### Equipped Play Space:

Required Equipped Play Space	Level 2 Catchment Baseline Population	Current Demand (ha)	Level 2 Catchment Future Population	Future Demand (ha)
0.2 ha per 1,000 population	c. 15,000	3	c. 17,000	3.4

The current and future demand can be compared to the existing open spaces as follows:

Open Space Type	Existing (ha)	Current Demand (ha)	Unmet Current Demand (ha)	Future Demand (ha)	Unmet Future Demand (ha)
Outdoor Play Space	8.72	24	15.28	27.2	<b>18.5</b>
Casual Play Space	4.15	9	4.85	10.2	<b>6.05</b>
Equipped Play Space	0.17	3	2.83	3.4	<b>3.25</b>

Casual play space and equipped play space are most usually permissible under an OS1 'Open Space' land use zoning objective, whereas outdoor play space is most usually permissible under an AOS 'Active Open Space' land use zoning objective.

### **Recommendation:**

On the basis of the above, the following minimum areas would be required to meet the future demand during the LAP period:



- **9.3ha** zoned for additional OS1 'Open Space' use.
- **18.5ha** zoned for additional AOS 'Active Open Space' use.

Suitable locations for the development of active open space are those which could fulfil some or all of the following criteria:

- Adjacent or in close proximity to lands zoned for new residential development.
- Located where such lands and ancillary facilities could also be used by nearby existing/future educational facilities.
- Located where such lands and ancillary facilities could also be used by nearby existing/future leisure and recreation facilities.
- Located where landscape amenity would be best served by development maintaining an 'open' aspect, as opposed to the substantial development of structures on the majority of a site.

The following objective should also be included in the local area plan:

**Suggested Blessington LAP Policy**

To facilitate and encourage the delivery of new open spaces, parks and multi-purpose sport uses close to the built-up area of Blessington, including covered spaces. In particular,

- To require the delivery of significant areas of outdoor play space on lands zoned AOS as part of SLO-2 and SLO-4
- To require the delivery of public parks on lands zoned OS1 in SLO-1 and SLO-8.

Swimming Pool/Leisure Centre:

As noted above, a Swimming Pool/Leisure Centre is among the facilities listed as Level 2 of the Community Facility Hierarchy Model which are not currently represented in Blessington.

Furthermore, CPO 7.43 of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 states the following: *'To prioritise, facilitate and support the development of a community swimming pool facility and a sports complex within the western region of the County, so located to achieve maximum accessibility to the residents of West Wicklow.'*

While Blessington may not necessarily be the definite location for such a facility in West Wicklow, it is considered prudent to zone for the possibility of such.

The Blessington Town Centre First Plan included a discussion of appropriate locations for such a facility. It summarised that such a site should include:

- *'Ease of access to appropriate local roads without increasing traffic along Main Street*
- *Ease of access to complementary 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*
- *No risk to any protected sites, habitats or water bodies and mitigation for any biodiversity loss*
- *Sustainable designs for the built form and external spaces*
- *Sustainable energy use and generation.'*

A review of other such facilities in Co. Wicklow indicates that the area for such facilities, and immediately surrounding car parking, varies between c. 0.8 hectares and c 1.1 hectares. The average site size is c. 1 hectares. Some of the potential locations indicated in the Town Centre First Plan should most appropriately

maintain their current land use zonings, or include zonings that provide for a wide range of uses, e.g. town centre/mixed use. Regardless, lands of c.1 ha should be zoned for CE 'Community & Education' purposes to allow for sufficient flexibility in any site selection process. Such lands should be in close proximity to lands zoned AOS 'Active Open Space' to allow for the joint use of swimming pool facilities either immediately adjacent or a short walk from playing pitches. Swimming pools/leisure centres may also be permissible in other land use zonings, e.g. Active Open Space, Tourism, Town Centre, etc. However, zoning lands for CE 'Community & Education' purposes will not detract from any quantitative standards for open space (as above).

**Recommendation:**

In relation to the provision of a swimming pool/leisure centre, as set out under the Community Facilities Hierarchy Model, at least 1 No. site of c. **1ha** should be zoned CE 'Community & Education' in close proximity to lands zoned AOS 'Active Open Space', to allow for flexibility in site selection on the part of the relevant authority, alongside the potential of the development of such a facility under a range of land use zonings. An objective supporting the development of such a facility should be included in the local area plan, as follows:

**Suggested  
Blessington  
LAP Policy**

To facilitate and support the development of a swimming pool/leisure centre within Blessington.

## 2.8 Social, Community & Cultural Facilities

### 2.8.1 Audit of Existing Social, Community & Cultural Facilities

A broad range of facilities are included under the term ‘Social, Community & Cultural Facilities’. This can include community centres, heritage centres, non-sport clubs or organisations, and arts or cultural buildings.

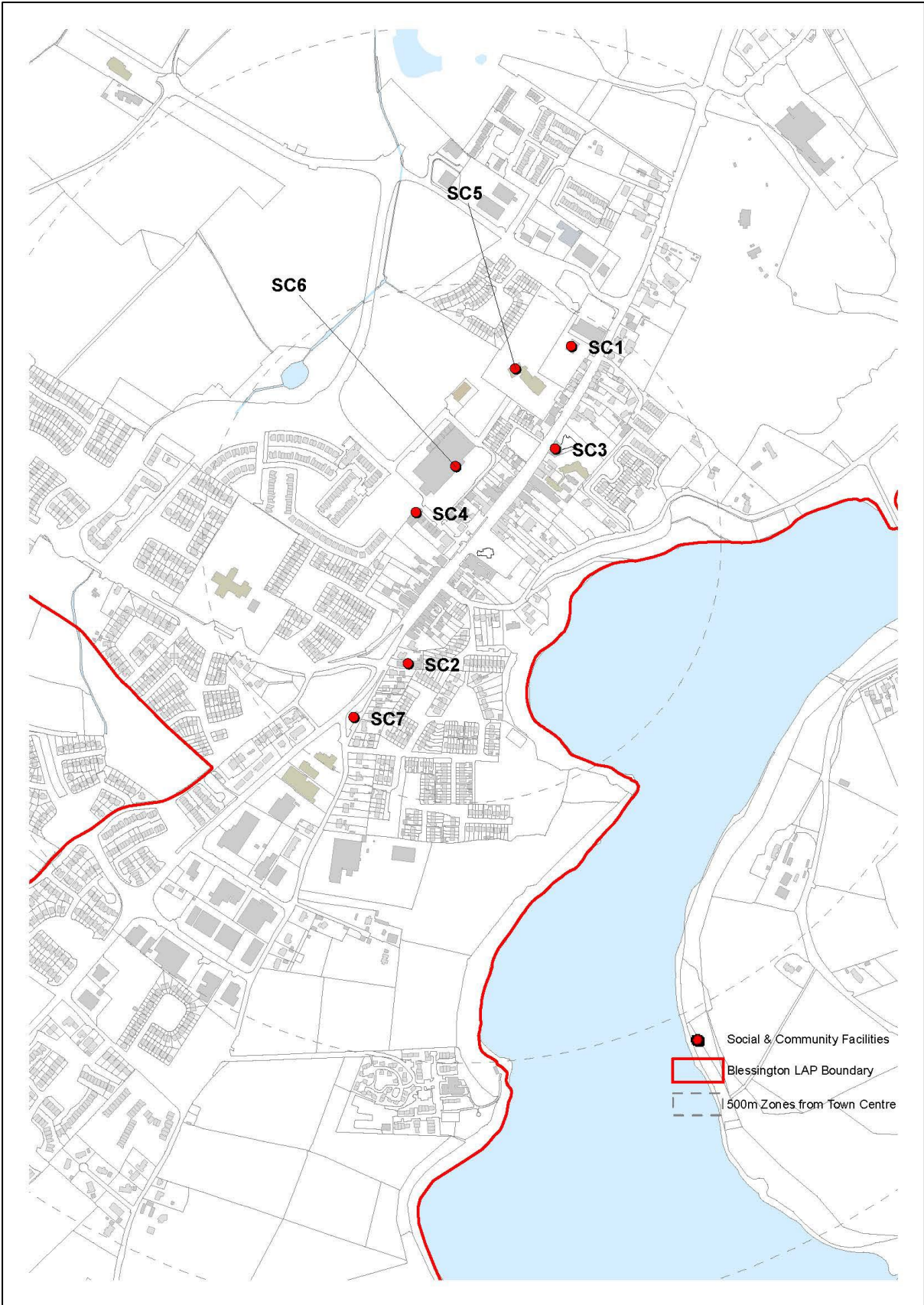
20 No. Social, Community & Cultural Facilities or organisations have been identified within Blessington, as follows:

Map Label	Name	Facility Type
SC1	St. Kevin’s Hall	Community Hall
SC2	St. Joseph’s Hall	Community Hall
SC3	Coimín Centre	Community Hall
SC4	Blessington Tourist Office	Tourist/Heritage Centre
SC5	Tramway Theatre	Arts/Cultural Building (200 seat)
SC6	Dance Trax/Ruth Shine School of Dance	Arts/Cultural Building
SC7	Blessington Men’s Shed	Non-Sport Organisation
n/a	Blessington Women’s Shed	Non-Sport Organisation
n/a	Blessington Youth Theatre	Non-Sport Organisation
n/a	West Wicklow Youth Project	Non-Sport Organisation/Youth Club
n/a	West Wicklow Chamber Music Festival	Non-Sport Organisation; Arts/Cultural Event
n/a	Blessington Musical and Dramatic Society	Non-Sport Organisation
n/a	Blessington History Society	Non-Sport Organisation
n/a	Blessington Active Retirement Group	Non-Sport Organisation
n/a	Blessington Cancer Support	Non-Sport Organisation
n/a	Cuidiú Blessington Breastfeeding group	Non-Sport Organisation
n/a	Blessington Bethany Bereavement Support Group	Non-Sport Organisation
n/a	Blessington St. Vincent de Paul	Non-Sport Organisation
n/a	Blessington & District Forum	Non-Sport Organisation
n/a	Blessington Tidy Towns	Non-Sport Organisation

**DISCLAIMER NOTE** – *This list is not intended to be exhaustive. Those facilities without map labels in the table above (and therefore not shown on the accompanying map) represent groups or periodic events without permanent physical premises.*

The physical Social, Community & Cultural facilities within the LAP 2013 boundary for Blessington show a strong concentration along Blessington Main Street, with all facilities located within 500m of one another. Due to the variety of uses represented by the various facilities, a more even distribution of facilities within residential areas of the town would not necessarily represent better access to each type of facility. This clustering is appropriate and maximises both the accessibility of the facilities themselves and the vibrancy/activity of the centre of Blessington.

Notably, located just beyond the LAP boundary for Blessington is Russborough House, the historic 18<sup>th</sup> Century Palladian House of national importance, which hosts a number of cultural and community events. This is of significant importance in the social, community, and cultural sphere in Blessington.



**Figure 2.11:** Social & Community Facilities within the Blessington LAP boundary. Note that the indicated boundary is that of the Blessington Local Area Plan 2013, which may be subject to change.

## 2.8.2 Demand Forecast Analysis for Social & Community Facilities

There are no national quantitative standards in relation to the provision of community halls and similar infrastructure. Neither are there standards in relation to the provision of floor space for independent sport or non-sport organisations, of which there is a wide variety in the area.

Direct consultation with community halls in Blessington was undertaken to determine whether any capacity constraints arise. Of the 3 No. community halls, 2 No. responded that they are generally able to accommodate groups who request the use of their facilities. However, 1 No. community hall indicated that they do have capacity issues and are not always able to accommodate all those who wish to use their facilities. Furthermore, one of the community halls which has no capacity issues also indicated that their facilities are not suitable for activities involving children (due to layout and risk of injury from glass panelling, etc.). This may constrain any additional demand for facilities into the remaining 1 No. community hall with no capacity issues.

The capacity constraints outlined above (including that not all community centres are appropriate for all users) combined with the projected population increase in Blessington indicates that there may be a necessity for a further community hall during the plan period.

## 2.9 Public Services

### 2.9.1 Audit of Existing Public Services Facilities

4 No. public service facilities have been identified within Blessington (exclusive of other facilities, e.g. health facilities, identified above), as follows:

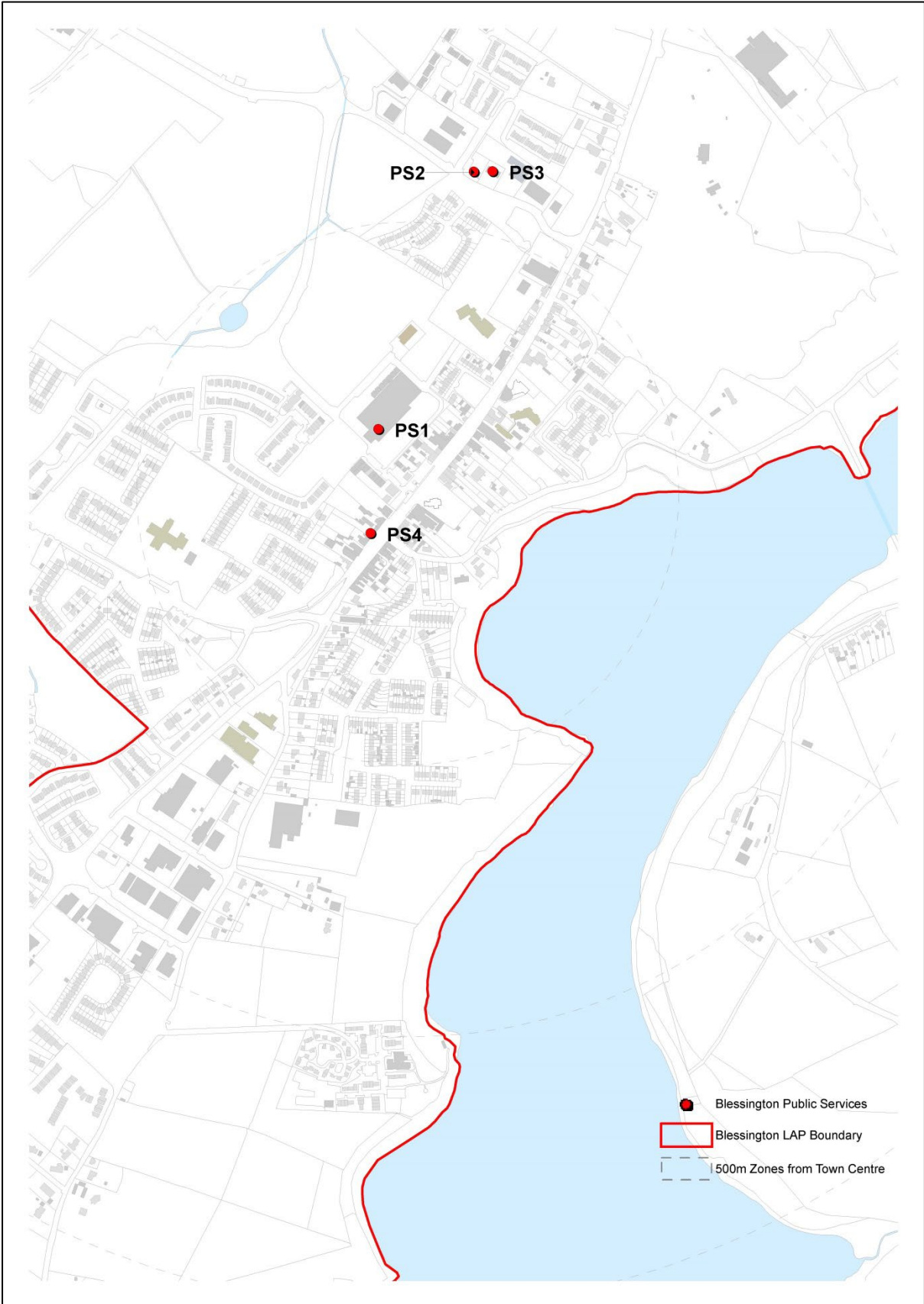
Map Label	Name	Facility Type
PS1	Blessington Library	Library
PS2	Blessington Fire Station	Fire Station
PS3	Baltinglass Municipal District Office	Local Government
PS4	Blessington Garda Station	Garda Station
N/A	Blessington Post Office (does not have a standalone premises but is rather located inside SuperValu on Blessington Main Street)	Post office

It is noted that Blessington Garda Station opens for short periods in the morning and evening, and is generally closed between the hours of 1pm and 7pm daily.

The number of facilities is limited such that a description of a 'cluster' is not necessarily accurate. Blessington Main Street and Town Centre is, as would be expected, the location of 3 No. facilities (Blessington Garda Station, Blessington Library, and Blessington Post Office). Blessington Civic Offices and the Fire Station are immediately adjacent to one another on Oak Drive, reflecting their development on Council owned land.

Though Oak Drive was originally developed as an industrial area and retains industrial uses, the clustering of fitness studios in former industrial units and the path dependency of adjacent Council owned land has led to the provision of social infrastructure in that location (civic offices, fire station, playground, Skate Park).





**Figure 2.12:** Public Services within Blessington. Note that the indicated boundary is that of the Blessington Local Area Plan 2013, which may be subject to change.

## **2.9.2 Demand Forecast Analysis for public services facilities**

There are no quantitative standards for the provision of the above listed public services facilities.

Of note is the fact that the Garda Station has limited opening hours. However, the ability to provide more consistent opening hours is beyond the remit of a Local Area Plan.

### **Recommendation:**

The operation of public services, e.g. Garda Station opening hours, etc., is not a matter for a land use plan. On this basis, it is not recommended to include objectives in relation to the operation of such services.

## **2.10 Other**

Facilities not covered under the above headings are included in this section.

### **2.10.1 Audit of Other Existing Facilities**

CPO 7.45 of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 states the following: *'Through the local plan process, to designate suitable open space & covered open space in all settlements, commensurate with its needs and existing facilities, in accordance with the provisions of the Wicklow County Council Play, Sport & Recreation and Active Open Space policies.'*

The provision of open space has been dealt with in Section 2.5 above. However, no covered open space has been identified in Blessington. The designation of a suitable location for covered open / recreational space may be required in any revision to the Blessington Local Area Plan.

### **2.10.2 Demand Forecast Analysis for Other Facilities**

There is no quantitative per capita standard set out in the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 for the provision of covered open space. However, the provision of covered open space in line with CPO 7.45 is currently unfulfilled. As no covered open space is currently provided, this unmet need will remain over the plan period.

## Part 3 Summary of Recommendations

### 3.0 General Social Infrastructure

The community development and infrastructure strategies, objectives and standards set out in the Wicklow County Development Plan will apply directly in the Blessington area. In particular, the County Development Plan addresses:

- The role of land use planning in community development; link between land use planning and the Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP)
- Community Facilities Hierarchy Model
- Education and Development
- Health and Care
- Culture & the Arts, including libraries and places of worship and burial
- Open space, Leisure and Recreation, including sports, children's play, facilities for teenagers and young adults

It is not considered necessary to re-state the majority of the objectives for these areas in this plan; however, priority concerns in the Blessington area identified in this SIA are (a) education, (b) health and care (including childcare), and (c) leisure & recreation, including sports facilities and community spaces, and therefore the should be addressed with appropriate objectives in the Local Area Plan:

#### Recommended Objective 1

It is important to retain what social infrastructure assets already exist in Blessington, to ensure that the zoning provisions and objectives for additional social infrastructure are not undermined by the loss of existing facilities elsewhere. On that basis, it is recommended to include the following objective in the local area plan:

#### **Suggested Blessington LAP Policy**

The Planning Authority will resist developments that entail the loss of existing community, education and open space/recreation lands or buildings unless it can be demonstrated that (a) adequate community, education and open space/recreation lands and buildings would be retained in the settlement having regard to the planned future population of the settlement or (b) the particular lands or buildings are not suitable or needed for current or future educational, community or open space / recreational usage. In particular, developments that would unduly constrain the ability of existing schools to expand will not be permitted.

#### Recommended Objective 2

Primary schools within the area generally have capacity (subject to the development of permitted upgrades). Permitted upgrades are outside Co. Wicklow and cannot therefore be influenced by the Blessington Local Area Plan. However, as discussed above, it is prudent to zone land for the purposes of additional primary educational needs within the plan area, if for any reason the permitted site cannot be progressed. On that basis, enough land should be zoned to accommodate an additional 8 to 16 classroom school, i.e. c.1.04 ha to 1.12 ha.

As there appears to be a shortfall in post-primary education capacity, even after the proposed expansion of Blessington Community College, it is considered appropriate to zone enough land to accommodate a 1,000 No. pupil school, i.e. at least 4.57 hectares, or 3.5 hectares where playing pitches are located/proposed in close proximity.

Policy support for the continued expansion of secondary school facilities (both existing and new) should be included in the Local Area Plan written statement.

The accompanying Blessington Local Transport Assessment has indicated that areas to the west of the existing built-up area, in the townland of Blessington Demesne, are suitable locations for the provision of educational facilities, both primary and post-primary. The Blessington Local Area Plan 2013 included lands zoned for Community & Education (CE) uses in these areas. Sufficient lands zoned Community & Education (CE) should be provided to accommodate the anticipated demand for additional education facilities.

**Suggested Blessington LAP Policy**

To facilitate the provision of schools on lands zoned Community and Education (CE) and to consider the provision of schools on any land use zoning, excluding OS1 and OS2 zones, where it is in line with the County Development Plan, this Local Area Plan, relevant planning guidelines (including the Department of Education guidelines) and proper planning and development.

**Recommended Objective 3**

It is clear that childcare is essentially at capacity in the Blessington area. While greenfield residential development in the town will be provided with childcare facilities via the development management process, existing unmet demand and the demand created by smaller scale infill development will not be accommodated. Furthermore, it is clear that there is a lack of physical childcare facilities, not just childcare operators, as evidenced by the co-location of childcare facilities in community halls and further education centres, which could cause knock-on capacity issues.

On this basis, policy objectives should be included to ensure the delivery of further physical childcare facilities beyond that required as part of large residential developments, and particularly as part of the development of future educational facilities, as follows:

**Suggested Blessington LAP Policy**

To facilitate and support the provision of new childcare facilities in a manner, which is compatible with land-use and transportation policies and adheres to the principles of sustainable development.

To facilitate and encourage the co-location of childcare facilities with other educational facilities such as schools. Applications for the development of new educational facilities, or the significant redevelopment or extensions of existing facilities, should consider the provision of co-located childcare facilities within the development.

**Recommended Objective 4**

Quantitative standards indicate that there is a need for further GP services in Blessington. Policy objectives should be included to support both the expansion of existing facilities and the provision of new facilities in accessible locations.

Policy objectives should be further included to support the expansion, where necessary, of Blessington Primary Care Centre in its current location.

With respect to nursing homes, it is considered that there are sufficient infill sites within the town centre to facilitate the development of either the currently permitted nursing homes or any additional facilities where required.

These recommendations will be integrated as policies into the local area plan as follows:

**Suggested Blessington LAP Policy**

To facilitate and encourage the continued operation of existing and development of new care and health related facilities, including (but not limited to) primary care centres, general practitioners surgeries, care / nursing homes and respite / hospice centres facilities particularly within the built-up area of Blessington.

**Recommended Objective 5**

There is an identified shortfall in the provision of outdoor play space, equipped place space and casual play space. On the basis of quantitative standards for the provision of open space, the following would be required:

c. 9.28ha **at a minimum** should be zoned for additional OS1 'Open Space' use. Additional OS1 'Open Space' land may be required to account for the recommendations of the accompanying Blessington Green Infrastructure Audit and Blessington Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, where relevant.

c. 18.48ha **at a minimum** should be zoned for additional AOS 'Active Open Space' use.

Suitable locations for the development of active open space are those which could fulfil some or all of the following criteria:

- Adjacent or in close proximity to lands zoned for new residential development.
- Located where such lands and ancillary facilities could also be used by nearby existing/future educational facilities.
- Located where such lands and ancillary facilities could also be used by nearby existing/future leisure and recreation facilities.
- Located where landscape amenity would be best served by development maintaining an 'open' aspect, as opposed to the substantial development of structures on the majority of a site.

The following objective should also be included in the local area plan:

**Suggested Blessington LAP Policy**

To facilitate and encourage the delivery of new open spaces, parks and multi-purpose sport uses close to the built-up area of Blessington, including covered spaces. In particular,  
- To require the delivery of significant areas of outdoor play space on lands zoned AOS as part of SLO-2 and SLO-4.  
- To require the delivery of public parks on lands zoned OS1 in SLO-1 and SLO-8.

**Recommended Objective 6**

Blessington is generally well served by community space, although some capacity constraints may arise in relation to the projected population growth during the plan period. On this basis, the requirement for the provision of community facilities on Doran's Pit should be maintained, or be required elsewhere if those lands do not remain zoned for such purposes, as follows:

**Suggested Blessington LAP Policy**

To facilitate and encourage the continued operation of existing and development of new community infrastructure, including (but not limited to) indoor multi-functional community spaces, youth centres etc., in Blessington. In particular, to require the development of a community hall in the redevelopment of Doran's Pit in line with SLO 4.



### Recommended Objective 7

In relation to the provision of a swimming pool/leisure centre, as set out under the Community Facilities Hierarchy Model, at least 1 No. site of c. **1ha** should be zoned CE 'Community & Education' in close proximity to lands zoned AOS 'Active Open Space', to allow for flexibility in site selection on the part of the relevant authority, alongside the potential of the development of such a facility under a range of land use zonings. An objective supporting the development of such a facility should be included in the local area plan, as follows:

**Suggested  
Blessington  
LAP Policy**

To facilitate and support the development of a swimming pool/leisure centre within Blessington.

Furthermore, it is recommended to include an objective in relation to the above identified lack of covered open space. The suggested objective in Section 3.5 above has accounted for this.

## Zoning Provisions for Social Infrastructure

Taking into account the above recommendations of the Social Infrastructure Audit, land will be zoned for the provision of additional social infrastructure within Blessington as follows:

<b>Lands Zoned for Community &amp; Education Use</b>		
<b>Location</b>	<b>Zoning</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>
Blessington Business Park/Oak Drive	CE	1.4
SLO2 (Blessington Demesne adjacent to KARE)	CE	3.6
SLO1 (Blessington Demesne Link Road)	CE	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>CE</b>	<b>6.3</b>

<b>Zoned for Open Space<sup>4</sup></b>		
<b>Location</b>	<b>Zoning</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>
New Town Park	OS1	15.3
N81/Naas Road Junction	OS1	1
Blessington Business Park	OS1	0.2
South of Naas Road (southern BIRR)	OS1	0.4
SLO 1 (Naas Road/Blessington Demesne Link Road)	OS1	3.9
SLO2 Blessington Demesne	AOS	14.9
SLO4 (Doran's Pit)	MU/AOS (see SLO4)	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>OS1/AOS/MU</b>	<b>39.0</b>

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the zoning of land as OS1 'Open Space' has also had regard to the recommendations of the accompanying Blessington Green Infrastructure Audit and Blessington Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, where relevant.





W I C K L O W

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ENDLESS OPPORTUNITIES