

SEA ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT APPENDIX II – NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

FOR THE

DRAFT BLESSINGTON LOCAL AREA PLAN 2025

for: Wicklow County Council



by: CAAS Ltd.



OCTOBER 2024

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Section 1 Introduction and Terms of Reference

This is the Non-Technical Summary of the Environmental Report for the Blessington Draft Local Area Plan (LAP) 2025. The purpose of the Environmental Report is to provide a clear understanding of the likely environmental consequences of decisions regarding the adoption and implementation of the Plan. The Environmental Report has been prepared as part of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process for the Plan.

What is SEA?

SEA is a systematic process of predicting and evaluating the likely environmental effects of implementing a proposed plan, or other strategic action, in order to ensure that these effects are appropriately addressed at the earliest appropriate stage of decision-making on a par with economic, social and other considerations.

Why is SEA needed? The Benefits

SEA is the Council's and the public's guide to what are generally the best areas for development in the Plan area.

SEA enables the Council to direct development towards robust, well-serviced and connected areas in the Plan area – thereby facilitating the general avoidance of incompatible development in the most sensitive, least well-serviced and least well-connected areas, in the Plan area and beyond.

SEA provides greater certainty to the public and to developers. Plans are more likely to be adopted without delays or challenges and planning applications are more likely to be granted permission. Environmental mitigation is more likely to cost less.

Most of the Plan area is identified as having low to moderate levels of sensitivity. The most sensitive areas in the Plan area include:

- Various locations and areas within the existing built-up footprint of Blessington, on account of cultural heritage designations, including entries to the Record of Monuments and Places, Entries to the Record of Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas;
- Glen Ding Hill and Forest; and
- Area within and surrounding the Poulaphouca Reservoir, rivers, streams and lakes, on account of ecological and visual sensitivities and elevated levels of flood risk.

The Plan directs incompatible development away from the most sensitive areas in the Plan area and focuses on directing compact, sustainable development within the proposed envelope of the Plan area. Development of these generally more robust, well-serviced and well-connected areas of the Plan area will contribute towards environmental protection and sustainable development, including climate mitigation and adaptation.

Compact development can be accompanied by placemaking initiatives to enable the Plan area to become a more desirable place to live – so that it maintains populations and services.

Compatible sustainable development in the Plan area's sensitive areas is also provided for, subject to various requirements relating to environmental protection and management being met.

How does the SEA work?

All of the main environmental issues in the area were assembled and considered by the team who prepared the Plan. This helped them to devise a Plan that contributes towards the protection and management of environmental sensitivities. It also helped to identify wherever potential conflicts between the Plan and the environment exist and enabled these conflicts to be mitigated.

The SEA was scoped in consultation with designated environmental authorities.

What is included in the Environmental Report that accompanies the Plan?

- A description of the environment and the key environmental issues;
- A description and assessment of alternatives for the Plan;
- An assessment of the provisions of the Plan; and,
- Mitigation measures, which will avoid/reduce the environmental effects of implementing the Plan and will contribute towards compliance with important environmental protection legislation.

Difficulties Encountered during the SEA process

No significant difficulties have been encountered during the undertaking of the assessment to date.

What happens at the end of the process?

An SEA Statement is prepared which summarises, inter alia, how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Plan.

Section 2 The Draft Plan

2.1 Introduction and Content

The Draft Blessington Local Area Plan 2025 has been prepared pursuant to Section 20 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

The purpose of the Plan is to put in place a land use framework that will guide the future sustainable development of the Blessington area. The Plan, in conjunction with the County Development Plan, will inform and manage the future development of the area.

2.2 Draft Plan Format

The Draft Plan comprises a written statement and a series of maps that provide a graphic representation of the content of the written text. Where there is any discrepancy between the text and maps, the text shall take precedence.

The Draft Plan is accompanied by a number of appendices, including this SEA Environmental Report. All of these documents have informed the crafting of the Plan.

2.3 Overall Strategy and Objectives

The Draft Plan sets out an Overall Strategy as follows:

- The key parameters for the future physical development of Blessington are based around protection of the environment, sustainability, compact growth and developing the settlement in a manner that will generate the minimal number of private car journeys and maximise walking, cycling and use of public transport.
- Consolidate the existing built pattern in Blessington by maximising the development potential of large sites close to the core and any infill sites and backland sites along the main roads within the town core of Blessington;
- To provide a framework for the future development of Blessington town centre to facilitate the development of this core area as the centre/focus of the settlement. To enhance the public realm in this centre and enhance connections and linkages to the residential areas surrounding the centre, as well as providing connections between this area and important recreational assets such as the Poulaphouca Reservoir.
- To promote and encourage the appropriate regeneration of quarry lands with a mix of uses including residential and other such uses that provide local job opportunities, and uses that support the existing town centre;
- To facilitate the appropriate development of greenfield residential lands that are serviced and serviceable within the settlement, particularly to the west of the town on the grounds of the former Blessington Demesne, in a managed / phased manner so as to align with the housing / population growth targets set out in the County Development Plan and the delivery of commensurate community services;
- To provide for new employment opportunities on serviced / serviceable greenfield lands at appropriate locations that are connected to local residential areas with walking, cycling and public transport facilities. There are a number of sites that have the potential for employment growth, e.g. former quarry lands, lands in the vicinity of Blessington WWTP, and on infill sites within existing industrial estates;
- To provide for new community, educational and recreational opportunities on serviced/ serviceable greenfield lands at appropriate locations that are connected to local residential areas with walking, cycling and public transport facilities. There are a number of sites that have the potential for new schools, community infrastructure and recreation / sports facilities, primarily along a part-constructed link road to the west of the town centre, south from the GAA grounds and towards Naas Road.
- To ensure that the lands surrounding the European Site of the Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA are protected from adverse impacts arising from new development and to carefully manage and control the extension of existing development in proximity to these areas. Generally, zoning for new development will only be provided for above the 194m contour adjoining the lakeshore.

The Overall Strategy is accompanied by other provisions including Objectives under the following headings:

- Town Centre Regeneration
- Housing/Residential Development
- Economic Development
- Tourism Development
- Community Development
- Heritage, Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure
- Infrastructure
- Zoning

2.4 Strategic work undertaken by the Council to ensure evidence-based planning

In preparing the Draft Plan, information relating to various sectors, from different Departments within the Councils and from different bodies and organisations, was gathered and analysed, contributing towards the development of evidence-led Plan provisions. This work included preparing the following documents that are appended to the Draft Plan: a Green Infrastructure Audit; a Town Centre First Plan (prepared by another section of the Council); a Social Infrastructure Audit; and an Infrastructure Delivery Schedule with associated details on implementation.

The undertaking of the SEA process was part of this strategic work and contributed towards the integration of environmental considerations into individual Plan provisions as summarised in Section 6 of this report.

2.5 Relationship with other relevant Plans and Programmes

It is important to note that when reading the Plan, the policy objectives of the County Development Plan are relevant and, in this regard, both documents should be read in tandem with each other. As detailed at Part A.1 Introduction of the Draft Plan:

“In particular, development standards, retail strategies, housing strategies etc that are included in the County Development Plan shall not be repeated, and shall be complied with throughout the implementation of this Local Area Plan. Any specific policies / objectives or development standards required for this area will be stated as precisely that, and in all cases will be consistent with the County Development Plan. Thus development standards will therefore be the same across the entire County, and any differences for specific settlements would be clear and transparent, to both those adopting the plans, and the general public alike.”

The Draft Plan sits within a hierarchy of statutory documents setting out public policy for, among other things, land use planning, infrastructure, sustainable development, tourism, environmental protection and environmental management. The Plan must comply with relevant higher-level strategic actions and will, in turn, guide lower-level strategic actions. These documents have been subject to their own environmental assessment processes, as relevant.

The National Planning Framework¹ sets out Ireland’s planning policy direction for the years 2018-2040. The National Planning Framework is to be implemented through Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and lower tier Development Plans and Local Area Plans. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region sets out objectives for land use planning, tourism, infrastructure, sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management that have been subject to environmental assessment and must, as relevant and appropriate, be implemented through the Wicklow County Development Plan, that sets out the overarching development strategy for the County, and the Local Area Plan.

In order to be realised, projects included in the Local Area Plan (in a similar way to other projects from any other sector) will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework.

¹ At the time of writing this report, a process to provide a First Revision to the National Planning Framework is underway.

Section 3 The Environmental Baseline

3.1 Introduction

The summary of the environmental baseline of the Plan area is described in this section. This baseline together with the Strategic Environmental Objectives, which are identified in Section 3.11, is used in order to identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the Draft Plan and in order to determine appropriate monitoring measures.

3.2 Likely Evolution of the Environment in the Absence of the Draft Plan

In the absence of a new Local Area Plan, the framework for development across the Plan area would be provided by the County Development Plan and other related documents. There would be no Local Area Plan to provide additional detail beyond that provided already through the existing planning framework as how to achieve sustainable development and environmental protection and management in the Plan area.

As a result, there would be both:

- A decreased likelihood in the extent, magnitude and frequency of the positive environmental effects identified by this assessment occurring; and;
- An increased likelihood in the extent, magnitude and frequency of the adverse environmental effects identified by this assessment occurring.

3.3 Biodiversity and Flora and Fauna

Key ecological sensitivities within and surrounding the Plan area include:

- The Poulaphouca Reservoir Special Protection Area, designated adjacent to the south and east of the Plan area. The sensitive features of the Poulaphouca Reservoir Special Protection Area include greylag goose and lesser black-backed gull.
- Non-statutorily proposed sites: Poulaphouca Reservoir proposed Natural Heritage Area partially within/adjacent to the Plan area and Red Bog Kildare proposed Natural Heritage Area located c. 1 km to the north of the Plan area.
- Other designated sites surrounding the Plan area, including Red Bog Kildare Special Area of Conservation located c. 1km to the north of the Plan area and Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area located 2 km to the south-east of the Plan area.
- Locally important, non-designated habitats within the Plan area, including Glen Ding Hill and Forest, various woodlands, mature trees, parks, gardens, hedgerows, old buildings/stone walls and lands used for agriculture within and surrounding the Plan area, providing habitats for flora and fauna and facilitating linkages and corridors to the surrounding countryside for the wildlife; and
- Aquatic and riverine ecology associated with rivers and streams and their tributaries and riparian buffer zones, including the River Liffey, Kings River, Blessington/Deerpark Stream.

Special Areas of Conservation² (SACs) and Special Protection Areas³ (SPAs) within 15 km of the Plan area are mapped at Figure 3.1.

Land cover is the observed physical cover, as seen from the ground or through remote sensing, including for example natural or planted vegetation, water and human constructions which cover the earth's surface. The CORINE 2018⁴ mapping (shown on Figure 3.2) identifies the land cover of central parts of the Plan area as urban fabric with adjacent areas of mineral extraction sites and surrounding lands identified as

² SACs have been selected for protection under the European Council Directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (92/43/EEC) due to their conservation value for habitats and species of importance in the European Union. The Habitats Directive seeks to establish Natura 2000, a network of protected areas throughout the EU. It is the responsibility of each member state to designate SACs to protect habitats and species, which, together with the SPAs designated under the 1979 Birds Directive, form Natura 2000. The European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 consolidate the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997 to 2005 and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Control of Recreational Activities) Regulations 2010. The Regulations have been prepared to address several judgments of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) against Ireland, notably cases C-418/04 and C-183/05, in respect of failure to transpose elements of the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive into Irish law.

³ SPAs have been selected for protection under the 1979 European Council Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC) - referred to as the Birds Directive - due to their conservation value for birds of importance in the EU.

⁴ The CORINE (Co-ordinated Information on the Environment) land cover data series was devised as a means of compiling geo-spatial environmental information in a standardised and comparable manner. CORINE has become a key data source for informing environmental and planning policy on a national and European level. The main land cover type in Ireland is agricultural land including forestry, which accounts for two-thirds of the national landmass. Most of this is permanent grassland pastures. Peatlands and wetlands are the second most widespread land cover type, covering almost one-fifth of the country. While forested areas cover about one-tenth of the country. Despite rapid development in the past two decades, Ireland's landscape is predominantly rural and agricultural.

pastures, coniferous forests and traditional woodland shrub. An area of a large water body (Poulaphouca Reservoir) is identified adjacent to the south and east of the Plan area. Categories from CORINE mapping that may indicate areas with the potential for Annex I habitats partially situated within and adjacent to the Plan area comprise water bodies.

Existing Problems

Ireland's Article 17 report on the Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland (DCHG, 2019) identifies various Irish, EU-protected habitats and species to be of unfavourable status and many to be still declining, although it also identifies that a range of positive actions are underway. Ireland's Article 12 Birds Directive Reports and the 6th National Report under the Convention of Biological Diversity identify similar issues.

The Plan includes measures to contribute towards the protection of biodiversity and flora and fauna and associated ecosystem services.

Previous changes in land uses arising from human development have resulted in a loss of biodiversity and flora and fauna; however, legislative objectives governing biodiversity and fauna were not identified as being conflicted with. The Plan includes measures to contribute towards the protection of biodiversity and flora and fauna and associated ecosystem services.

3.4 Population and Human Health

The results of Census 2022 within the CSO boundary of Blessington recorded a population of 5,611 persons.

The Core Strategy in Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 (as varied) provides for a population growth in Blessington up to 6,145 persons by 2028 and 6,313 persons by 2031.

Blessington acts as the service centre for a wide rural catchment including the villages of Hollywood, Manor Kilbride, Lackan, Ballyknockan, Dunlavin, Donard and Vallemount (in County Wicklow), Rathmore, Eadestown, Ballymore (in County Kildare) and Brittas in County Dublin.

The population provided for in the Plan will interact with various environmental components. Potential interactions include:

- Recreational and development pressure on habitats and landscapes;
- Contribution towards increase in demand for waste water treatment at the municipal level;
- Contribution towards increase in demand for water supply and associated potential impact of water abstraction;
- Potential interactions in flood-sensitive areas; and
- Potential effects on water quality.

Human health has the potential to be impacted upon by environmental vectors (i.e. environmental components such as air, water or soil through which contaminants or pollutants, which have the potential to cause harm, can be transported so that they come into contact with human beings). Hazards or nuisances to human health can arise as a result of exposure to these vectors arising from incompatible adjacent land uses for example. These factors have been considered with regard to the description of: the baseline of each environmental component; and the identification and evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan.

Existing Problems

The number of homes within the Plan area with radon levels above the reference level is within the normal range experienced in other locations across the country.

Parts of the Plan area are vulnerable to adverse effects from changes in the occurrence of severe rainfall events and associated flooding from surface water. Flooding in certain circumstances could pose a risk to human health. There is historic and predictive evidence of flooding within the Plan area.

3.5 Soil

Main soil types surrounding the built-up areas⁵ of Blessington are: luvisol soils (generally fertile, widely used for agriculture and associated with significant accumulation of clay); brown earths (well-drained mineral soils, associated with high levels of natural fertility); and alluvial soils (associated with alluvial clay, silt or sand river deposits).

Geological Survey Ireland coordinate the Irish Geological Heritage Programme, whereby an objective has been set to identify and select sites of geological interest within each county across the country. County Geological Sites (CGSs) do not receive statutory protection like Natural Heritage Areas but receive an effective protection from their inclusion in the planning system. The audit of CGSs in County Wicklow was completed in 2014, which identified 62 CGSs in County Wicklow. The audit of CGSs in County Kildare was completed in 2005, which identified 22 CGSs. There are three designated County Geological Sites occurring within or partially within the Plan area: two Glen Ding CGSs (Site Code: KE006 and Site Code: WW022); and Blessington Delta CGS (Site Code: WW012).

The term "landslide" describes a wide variety of processes that result in the downward and outward movement of materials such as rock, debris, earth, mud and peat under the force of gravity. Issues such as existing ground conditions, slope stability and storage of excavated material have the potential to influence susceptibility to landslides/bog bursts. The potential impacts of landslides include loss of human life/injury, flooding, pollution of watercourses and impacts upon aquatic biodiversity. The Geological Survey Ireland have identified⁶ the Plan area as having mainly low, with moderately low and moderately high levels of landslide susceptibility occurring to the north-west and along water courses to the east and south.

Source Protection Area delineation provides an assessment of the land area that contributes groundwater to a borehole or spring. Source reports have been undertaken by the GSI on behalf of Local Authorities since the mid-1990s. Public Supply Source Protection Areas are managed by Uisce Éireann to supply Public Water Supply Schemes across Ireland. Source Protection Areas provide protection by placing tighter controls on activities within all or part of the zone of contribution of the source. There are two Source Protection Areas (an Inner and an associated Outer Area) identified within the Plan area.

In the absence of mitigation, contaminated materials have the potential to adversely impact upon human health, water quality and habitats and species. As is the case with other urban, semi-urban and port areas across the country, there is potential for contamination at sites within the Plan area, especially where land uses occurred in the past, in the absence of environmental protection legislation.

3.6 Water

Since 2000, Water Management in the EU has been directed by the Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC (WFD). The WFD requires that all Member States implement the necessary measures to prevent deterioration of the status of all waters - surface, ground, estuarine and coastal - and protect, enhance and restore all waters with the aim of achieving *good status*. All public bodies are required to coordinate their policies and operations so as to maintain the *good status* of water bodies that are currently unpolluted and improve polluted water bodies to *good status*.

Poulaphouca Reservoir to the south and east of Blessington is a man-made lake created in 1944 by the damming of the River Liffey at Poulaphouca waterfall, to the south of the town. Poulaphouca Reservoir is hydraulically connected to the aquifers that underlie Blessington and its surrounds. Surface water at and around Blessington is channelled by several rivers and streams. The reservoir receives water from the River Liffey, at the northern end, and the Kings River, at the southern end. The exit is into the River Liffey gorge at the western end. The Blessington/Deerpark Stream has its source in Deerpark and feeds into the pond in Blessington Demesne before it flows through the west of the town and into Poulaphouca Reservoir at the Burgage More to the immediate south of the Town.

⁵ The built-up areas are mainly made up of urban soils. Urban soils are soils, which have been disturbed, transported or manipulated by human activity in the urban environment and are often overlain by a non-agricultural, man-made surface layer that has been produced by mixing, filling or by contamination of land surfaces in urban and suburban areas.

⁶ <https://www.gsi.ie/en-ie/programmes-and-projects/geohazards/projects/Pages/Landslide-Susceptibility-Mapping.aspx>

The current WFD (2016-2021) status⁷ of the rivers and streams draining the Plan area is *good* (identified by the EPA as: Liffey_040; and Goldenhill_010). The status of the lakes (2016-2021) within and adjacent to the Plan area is identified as *good* (identified by the EPA as: Poulaphouca and Red Bog). Figure 3.3 illustrates the WFD surface water status within and surrounding the Plan area.

The WFD status (2016-2021) of groundwater underlying the Plan area is currently identified as being of *good status*, meeting the objectives of the WFD.

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) document accompanies this SEA Environmental Report and the Draft Plan. Requirements in relation to SFRA are provided under 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (Department of Environment and Office of Public Works, 2009) and associated Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government Circular PL2/2014. Flood risk management and drainage provisions are already in force through the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 (as varied) and related provisions have been integrated into the LAP. In addition, land use zoning contained within the Draft Plan has been informed by the SFRA process and associated delineation of flood risk zones. Historical flooding is documented by the Office of Public Works. Recurring flood events are identified within the Plan area. Predictive flood risk mapping is also available from the Office of Public Works. The most significant source of flood risk within the Plan area is from fluvial (from rivers and streams) sources. There are other sources of flooding present including from pluvial (rainwater) and from surface drainage systems sources.

Existing Problems

There is elevated levels of flood risk from fluvial sources at various locations across the Plan area. The preparation of the Plan, SEA and SFRA has taken place concurrently and the findings of the SFRA have informed both the Plan and the SEA.

⁷ As per EPA's WFD Status 2016-2021 classification (<https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/>).

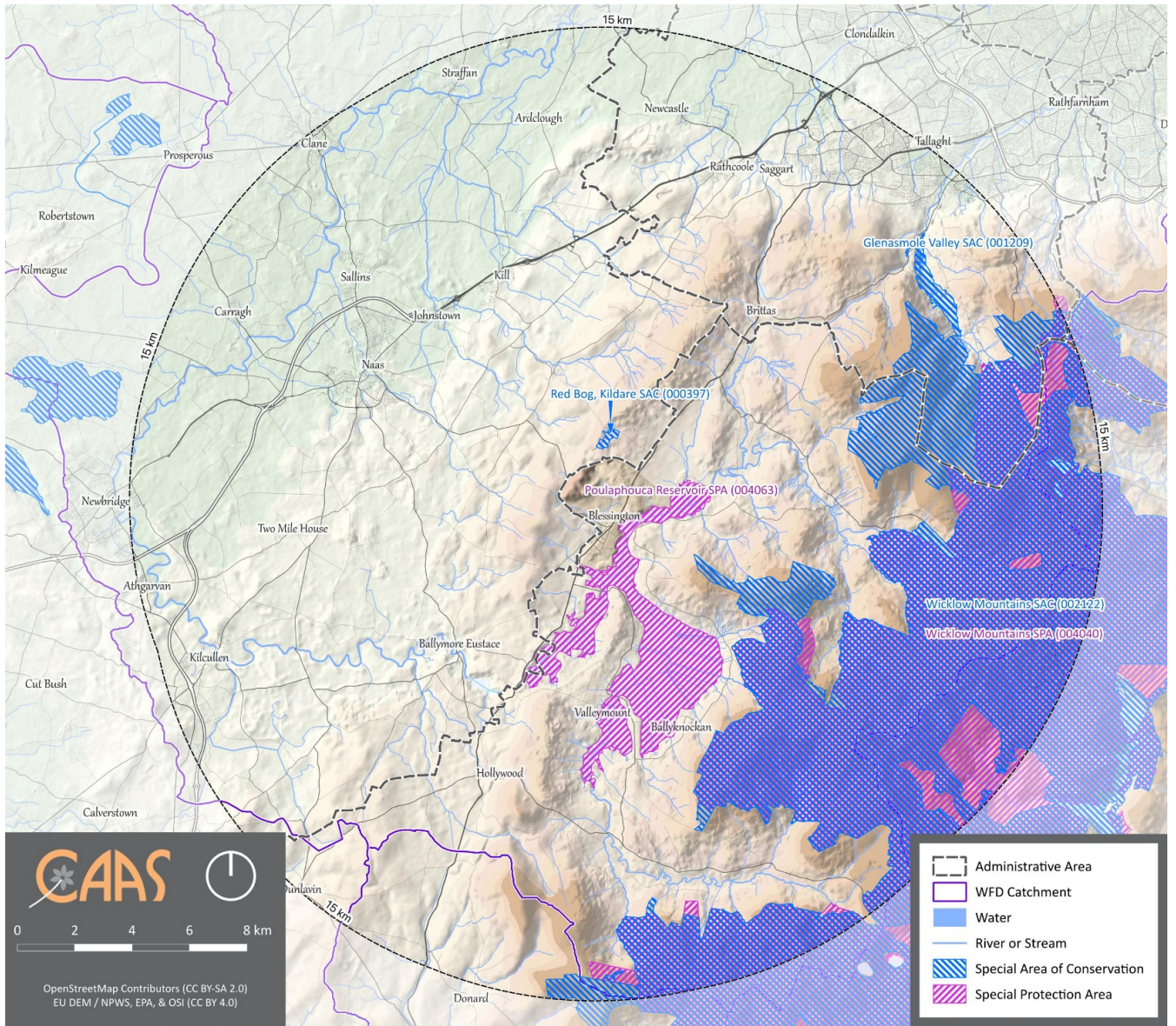


Figure 3.1 European Sites within and within 15 km buffer of the Plan area

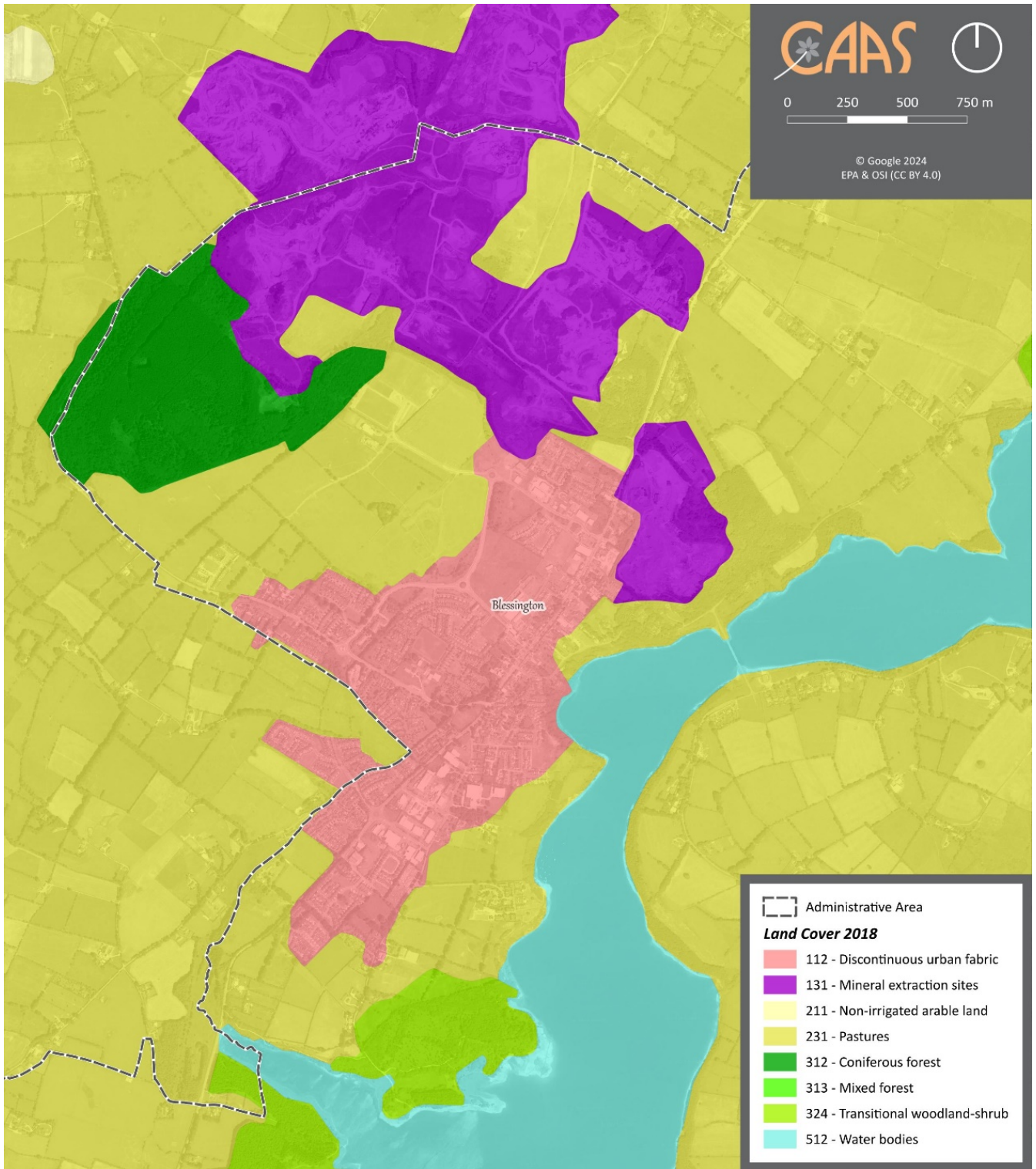


Figure 3.2 CORINE Land Cover Mapping 2018

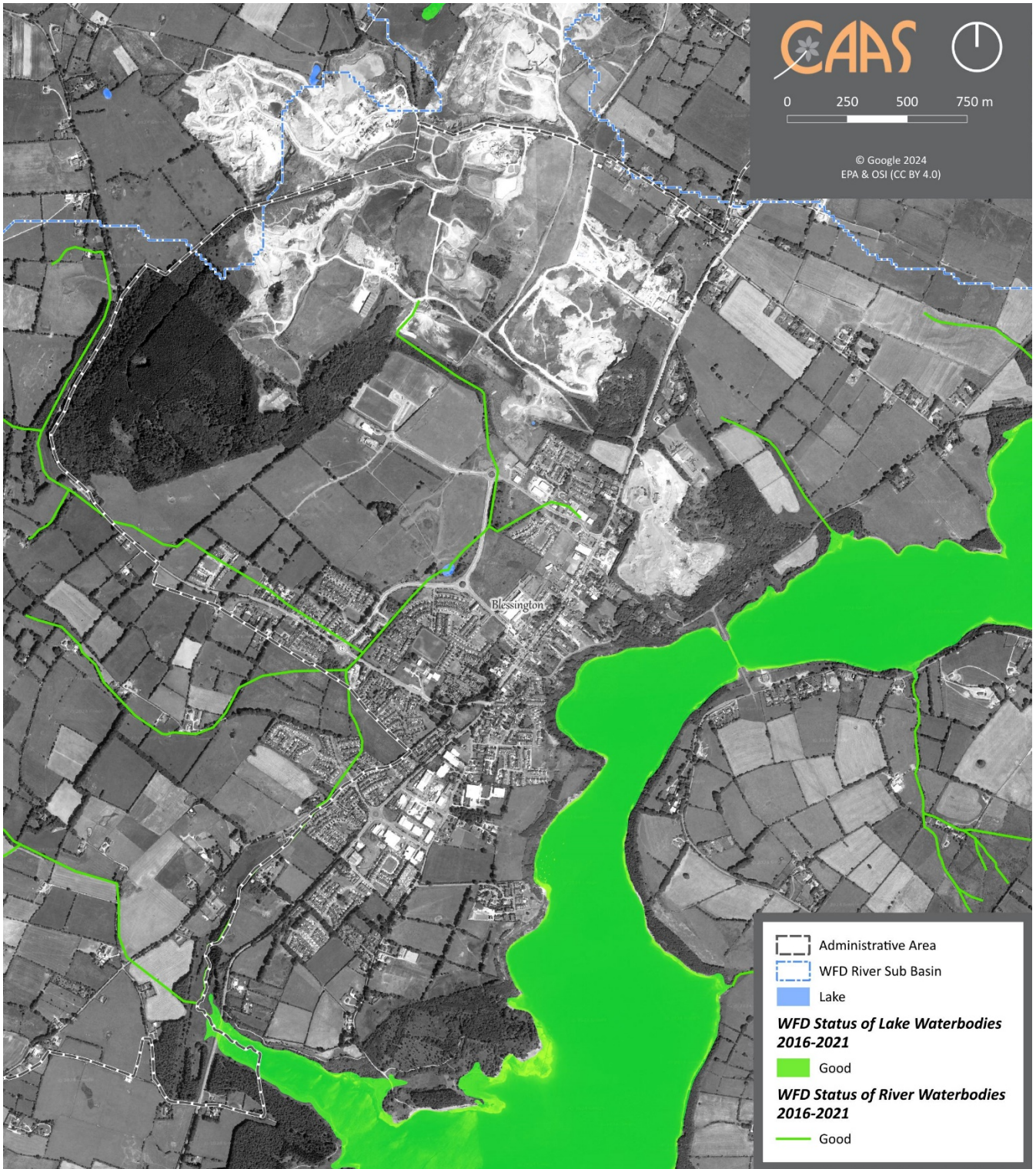


Figure 3.3 Surface Water Status (2016-2021)

3.7 Air and Climatic Factors

Total emissions of greenhouse gases by humans come from various sectors including transport, agriculture, energy industries, manufacturing combustion, industrial processes, residential developments, commercial services developments, waste management processes and fluorinated gases equipment (such as refrigeration and fire protection systems).

In 2023, Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions are estimated to be 55.01 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO₂ eq), which is 6.8% lower (or 4.00 Mt CO₂ eq) than emissions in 2022 (59.00 Mt CO₂ eq) and follows a 2.0% decrease in emissions reported for 2022. Emissions are 1.2% below the historical 1990 baseline for the first time in 33 years. In 2023, emissions in the stationary EU Emissions Trading System emissions (covering emissions from sectors including Agriculture, Transport, Energy, Industries, Residential, Manufacturing Combustion and Industrial Processes) decreased by 17%. When land use, land-use change and forestry is included, total national emissions decreased by 3.8%. Emissions under the Effort Sharing Regulation (covering emissions from the electricity and heat generation, industrial manufacturing and aviation sectors) decreased by 3.4%. Decreased emissions in 2023 compared to 2022 were observed in the largest sectors except for transport which showed an increase of 0.3%.

The Wicklow Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 provides information on the breakdown of emissions from County Wicklow:

- In 2018, the baseline year, Ireland's national greenhouse gas emissions were approximately 70,235 ktonnes CO₂ eq.
- Emissions within the Wicklow County Council area are estimated to have been 1,101 ktonnes CO₂ eq in 2018.
- Of total emission in County Wicklow, the agriculture sector accounted for 40%, the residential sector for 25%, the transport sector for 24%, the Commercial and Public Sector for 9%, the Municipal sector for 1% and the Waste sector for 1%.

Climate mitigation describes the action to reduce the likelihood of climate change occurring or reduce the impact if it does occur. This can include reducing the causes of climate change (e.g. emissions of greenhouse gases) as well as reducing future risks associated with climate change. The National Climate Action Plan 2024 is the second statutory update to the plan since the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 was signed into law, committing Ireland to 2030 and 2050 targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It builds on Climate Action Plan 2023, outlining how Ireland will accelerate the actions required to respond to the climate crisis, putting climate solutions at the centre of Ireland's social and economic development.

Climate adaptation is a change in natural or human systems in response to the impacts of climate change. These changes moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities and can be in response to actual or expected impacts. The National Adaptation Framework (2024) aims to create a unified approach involving both government and society to adapt to climate change. It outlines how various sectors and local authorities can implement adaptation measures to minimise Ireland's vulnerability to climate change's adverse effects while taking advantage of any beneficial impacts. The Framework emphasises the importance of integrating adaptation strategies into all levels of policy making, infrastructure development, and local planning.

The Wicklow Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 will contribute towards addressing the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, climate change adaptation, and strengthening the alignment between national climate policy and the delivery of local climate action. The local objectives of Wicklow County Council's Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 are grouped under five thematic areas as follows:

- Governance and Leadership
- Built Environment and Transport
- Natural Environment and Green Infrastructure
- Communities: Resilience and Transition
- Sustainability and Resource Management

The EPA's (2024) *Air Quality in Ireland 2023 Report* identifies that:

- Ireland's latest monitoring shows we are in compliance with current EU standards.
- Ireland is not on track to achieve its ambition, set out in the National Clean Air Strategy, to meet the health-based WHO air quality guideline limits in 2026.
- Main pollutants of concern are fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) from solid fuel combustion and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) from vehicle emissions/traffic.

- Air pollution can be a major environmental risk to people's health, with approximately 1,600 premature deaths annually in Ireland due to poor air quality.

The report further identifies the critical role of local authorities in the enforcement and implementation of existing plans and investment in infrastructure to encourage cleaner and healthier air quality choices, including:

- Local authorities must provide more resources to implement the new solid fuel regulations and full implementation of air quality plans.
- Local authorities must prioritise resource allocation of resources to advance enforcement.
- Investment in clean public transport infrastructure across the country must be maintained and increased.
- More safe footpaths and cycle lanes must be created to continue to increase active travel as a viable and safe alternative to car use and associated NO₂ emissions.

Existing Problems

Significant progress is being made in the reduction of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. The EPA's 2024 publication Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emission Projections 2023-2040 identifies that Ireland's emissions, under the Emissions in the 'Planned Additional Measures' scenario, which includes most 2024 Climate Action Plan measures, are projected to be 29% lower in 2030 (compared with 2018). However, this would not meet the 51% emissions reduction target (by 2030 compared to 2018) based on these projections.

In the Climate Change Advisory Council's *Annual Review 2024*, the findings of an assessment of the degree to which progress is being made solely in the implementation of adaptation policy and increasing resilience for the period April 2023 to March 2024 is provided. The Review details that four sectors (Transport, Flood Risk Management, Built and Archaeological Heritage and Local Government) demonstrated good overall progress, six showed moderate progress (Agriculture, Forestry and Seafood, National Adaptation Framework, Communications Networks, Water Quality and Water Services Infrastructure, Health and Electricity and Gas Networks) and one (Biodiversity) showed no progress and supplied insufficient evidence. This was a slight improvement compared with the results in 2023.

Air quality and noise can present challenges, especially in urban areas, as detailed under the relevant sub-sections above. With regard to air quality, air pollution from transport is dominated by NO_x emissions. Of these, NO₂ is particularly impactful from a health perspective. The Draft Plan will help to facilitate reductions in emissions and a transition from dependence on fossil fuel combustion powered transport.

3.8 Material Assets

Other material assets, in addition to those referred to below, covered by the SEA include archaeological and architectural heritage (see Section 3.9) natural resources of economic value, such as water and air (see Sections 3.6 and 3.7).

Public Assets and Infrastructure

Public assets and infrastructure that have the potential to be impacted upon by the Plan, if unmitigated, include: the town of Blessington; resources such as public open spaces, parks and recreational areas; public buildings and services; transport and utility infrastructure (electricity, gas, telecommunications, water supply, waste water infrastructure etc.); and natural resources that are covered under other topics such as water and soil.

Land

The Plan has the potential to assist with the reuse and regeneration of brownfield sites thereby contributing towards sustainable mobility and reducing the need to develop greenfield lands and associated potential adverse environmental effects. Brownfield lands are generally located within urban/suburban areas.

Green Infrastructure

Parks and open space promote health and well-being, provide recreational facilities and range of habitats for various species. Green infrastructure is also a crucial component in building resilient communities capable of adapting to the consequences of climate change with trees, woodlands and wetlands providing carbon capture and slowing water flows while improving air quality.

Woodland

Woodlands provide recreational opportunities in addition to their heritage and economic benefits. They are a valuable resource in terms of biodiversity, recreation and tourism, and also important as links in the green infrastructure network.

Transport

Blessington is served by the N81 that transverses the Plan area and provides transport routes to Dublin, Baltinglass and Tullow. Blessington is also served by secondary roads, including the R410, which links Blessington to Naas. Other local roads provide links to Ballymore Eustace and Manor Kilbride. In addition, bus services are provided by Local Link (with services to Sallins, Naas, Wicklow Town and Arklow), Bus Éireann (with routes to Dublin and Rosslare Europort) and Dublin Bus (with routes including to Dublin). National, regional and local roads provide vital links between the town and retail, service and employment centres throughout the County and to adjoining counties. A Local Transport Assessment has been integrated into the Plan to help ensure a shift towards more sustainable modes of transport.

Minerals and Aggregates

Significant amounts of sand and gravel quarrying have taken place in close proximity to the town, largely on the 'Blessington Delta' CGS in an arc around the northern part of the town. These quarrying lands could provide redevelopment opportunities as aggregate resources are depleted and quarry remediation takes place.

Waste Water

Uisce Éireann, working in partnership with Wicklow County Council, is making investments to undertake essential upgrade works to waste treatment plants in towns and villages across the County. The upgrading of infrastructure will contribute towards compliance with the Water Framework Directive, EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and Drinking Water Regulations and will help to protect human health and maintain the quality of surface and ground waters. Uisce Éireann have recently completed an upgrade to Blessington Waste Water Treatment Plant to c. 9,000 population equivalent, which would serve the level of growth envisioned by the Wicklow County Development Plan Core Strategy over the plan period.⁸

Water Supply

Uisce Éireann is responsible for providing and maintaining adequate public water supply infrastructure throughout County Wicklow. Blessington is located within the Greater Dublin Area Water Resource Zone⁹ and, as identified by Uisce Éireann, there is capacity available to meet targeted population growth by 2032, although an improvement in level of service is required.¹⁰

Waste Management

The National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy (Regional Waste Management Planning Offices, 2024) sets out a framework for the prevention and management of waste in Ireland for the period 2024 to 2030. The Plan seeks to influence sustainable consumption and prevent the generation of waste, improve the capture of materials to optimise circularity and enable compliance with policy and legislation.

Existing Problems

The provisions of the Plan will contribute towards protection of the environment with regard to impacts arising from material assets. The provision of infrastructure and supporting services for development, particularly water and wastewater services, is critical.

3.9 Cultural Heritage

Archaeological Heritage

The Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) is an inventory, put on a statutory basis by amendment to the National Monuments Act 1994, of sites and areas of archaeological significance, numbered and mapped. It is available from the National Monuments Service and at archaeology.ie. There are various entries to RMP within the Plan area, including two Major Sites of Archaeological Importance in Wicklow in State Ownership: St. Mark's Cross at Burgage More in Burgage Cemetery (a High Cross dating from the 12th

⁸ Draft Blessington Local Area Plan 2025

⁹ A Water Resource Zone (WRZ) is an independent water supply system serving a region, city, town or village and is governed by topography or the extent of the water distribution network in an area. A WRZ may include multiple Water Treatment Plants and/or sources.

¹⁰This may take the form of leakage reduction and/or capital investment to maintain/improve levels of service as the demand increases. Proposed solutions will be developed and prioritised through the National Water Resources Plan and investment planning process. Source: <https://www.water.ie/connections/developer-services/capacity-registers/water-supply-capacity-register/wicklow/> (Published in June 2023).

Century and originally located at an ancient church, which is now submerged in the lake) and Rath Turtle Moat located near the top of Glen Ding woodland. There is no Area of Archaeological Significance or Potential within the boundary of the Plan area. However, an Area of Archaeological Significance and Potential is located at the deserted medieval borough of Burgage, immediately adjacent to the south of the Plan boundary.

Architectural Heritage

Protected structures are defined in the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended as structures, or parts of structures that are of special interest from an architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical point of view. There are a total of 7 entries in the RPS within the Plan area, as set out in Appendix 4 of Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 (as varied). Clusters of architectural heritage are indicated within the town's centre. Notable Protected Structures include: the Rectory, Blessington; and Blessington Church of Ireland Church. Many of these Protected Structures are located within central parts of Blessington and within the Architectural Conservation Area (ACA). An ACA is a place, area, group of structures or townscape, which is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or contributes to the appreciation of a Protected Structure. An ACA may or may not include Protected Structures. In an ACA, protection is placed on the external appearance of such areas or structures. There is currently one ACA designated within the Plan area, namely the Blessington ACA (shown on Figure 4.19).

Existing Problems

The context of archaeological and architectural heritage has changed over time however no existing conflicts with legislative objectives governing archaeological and architectural heritage have been identified.

3.10 Landscape

Blessington is surrounded by various hills to the north and west, the Poulaphouca Reservoir to the east and south and the Wicklow Mountains to the east. The land surrounding the town is predominantly made up of agricultural land and an area of woodland (Glen Ding Wood) to the north-west of the Plan area, bounded by an adjacent existing quarry. The River Liffey flows into the Poulaphouca Reservoir to the east of the Plan area, exiting at Poulaphouca dam to the south west of the Plan area. The reservoir is an important recreational asset to the town and its surrounds.

The Plan area is located within the 'Western Corridor' Landscape Category, immediately adjoining Blessington Lakes Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and within the 'Urban', 'Blessington Lakes' and 'N81 Corridor' Landscape Character Areas. There are no views, as listed in the Wicklow County Development Plan (as varied), currently within the Plan area. However, View No. 33, immediately south of the Plan boundary, originating from the N81 at Burgage More includes views of the Poulaphouca Reservoir and inlet. The Draft Plan provides for the protection of the following additional views:

- From St. Mary's Church to Bastion Wood and Glen Ding Forest.
- From side streets/laneways east (to the Poulaphouca Reservoir/Wicklow Mountains) and west (to Glen Ding) from Blessington Main Street.

Existing Problems

New developments have resulted in changes to the visual appearance of lands within the Plan area however legislative objectives governing landscape and visual appearance were not identified as being conflicted with.

3.11 Strategic Environmental Objectives

Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) are methodological measures developed from policies that generally govern environmental protection objectives established at international, Community or Member State level e.g. the environmental protection objectives of various European Directives that have been transposed into Irish law and which are required to be implemented. The SEOs are set out under a range of topics (see Table 3.1) and are used as standards against which the provisions of the Plan and the alternatives are evaluated in order to help identify which provisions would be likely to result in significant environmental effects and where such effects would be likely to occur, if – in the case of adverse effects – unmitigated.

Table 3.1 Strategic Environmental Objectives

| Environmental Component | SEO Code | Guiding Principle | Strategic Environmental Objectives |
|--------------------------------------|------------|--|--|
| Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna | BFF | No net contribution to biodiversity losses or deterioration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To preserve, protect, maintain and, where appropriate, enhance the terrestrial, aquatic and soil biodiversity, particularly EU designated sites and protected species Ensure no adverse effects on the integrity of any European site, with regard to its qualifying interests, associated conservation status, structure and function Safeguard national, regional and local designated sites and supporting features which function as stepping stones for migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species Enhance biodiversity in line with the National Biodiversity Strategy and its targets To protect, maintain and conserve natural capital |
| Population and Human Health | PHH | Improve quality of life for all ages and abilities based on high-quality, serviced, well connected and sustainable residential, working, educational and recreational environments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote economic growth to encourage retention of working age population and funding of sustainable development and environmental protection and management Ensure that existing population and planned growth is matched with the required public infrastructure and the required services Safeguard citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and well-being |
| Soil (and Land) | S | Ensure the long-term sustainable management of land | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect soils against pollution, and prevent degradation of the soil resource Promote the sustainable use of infill and brownfield sites over the use of greenfield Safeguard areas of prime agricultural land and designated geological sites |
| Water | W | Protection, improvement and sustainable management of the water resource | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the status of water bodies is protected, maintained and improved in line with the requirements of the Water Framework Directive Ensure water resources are sustainably managed to deliver proposed regional and County growth targets in the context of existing and projected water supply and wastewater capacity constraints ensuring the protection of receiving environments Avoid inappropriate zoning and development in areas at risk of flooding and areas that are vulnerable to current and future erosion Integrate sustainable water management solutions (such as SuDS, porous surfacing and green roofs) into development proposals |
| Material Assets | MA | Sustainable and efficient use of natural resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimise existing infrastructure and provide new infrastructure to match population distribution proposals - this includes transport infrastructure Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all which encourages a broad energy generation mix to ensure security of supply – wind, solar, hydro, biomass, energy from waste and traditional fossil fuels Promote the circular economy, reduce waste, and increase energy efficiencies Ensure there is adequate sewerage and drainage infrastructure in place to support new development Reduce the energy demand from the transport sector and support moves to electrification of road and rail transport modes Encourage the transition to a zero-carbon economy by facilitating the development of a grid infrastructure to support renewables and international connectivity. Reduce the average energy consumption per capita including promoting energy efficient buildings, retrofitting, smart- buildings, cities and grids |
| Air | A | Support clean air policies that reduce the impact of air pollution on the environment and public health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects on human health and the environment as a whole resulting from emissions to air from all sectors with particular reference to emissions from transport, residential heating, industry and agriculture Maintain and promote continuing improvement in air quality through the reduction of emissions and promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency Promote continuing improvement in air quality Reduction of emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, ammonia and fine particulate matter which are responsible for acidification, eutrophication and ground-level ozone pollution Meet Air Quality Directive standards for the protection of human health – Air Quality Directive Significantly decrease noise pollution and move closer to WHO recommended levels |
| Climatic Factors | C | Achieving transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient economy that is cognisant of environmental impacts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise emissions of greenhouse gasses Integrate sustainable design solutions into infrastructure (e.g. energy efficient buildings; green infrastructure) Contribute towards the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in line with national targets Promote development resilient to the effects of climate change Promote the use of renewable energy, energy efficient development and increased use of public transport |
| Cultural Heritage | CH | Safeguard cultural heritage features and their settings through responsible design and positioning of development | Protect places, features, buildings and landscapes of cultural, archaeological or architectural heritage |
| Landscape | L | Protect and enhance the landscape character | To implement the Plan's framework for identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes having regard to the European Landscape Convention |

Section 4 Alternatives

4.1 Introduction

The SEA Directive requires that reasonable alternatives (taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme) are identified, described and evaluated for their likely significant effects on the environment. Summaries of the alternatives for the Plan and their assessment are provided below.

Six alternatives for the Local Area Plan are identified and considered under a number of different future development scenarios, as detailed under subsections 4.3.1 to 4.3.6 below.

4.2 Limitations in Available Alternatives

The Plan is required to be consistent with the existing, already in force, Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 and the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), which specifies various types of objectives that must be provided for by the Plan.

The alternatives available for the Plan are significantly limited by the provisions of higher-level planning objectives, which are not wholly consistent with each other, including those of the National Planning Framework, the Eastern and Midlands Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, Minister Guidelines and the County Plan. These documents set out various requirements for the content of the Plan, including on topics such as population, land use zoning and proper planning and sustainable development.

4.3 Alternatives Description and Assessment Summary

An overall comparative assessment of the alternatives against Strategic Environmental Objectives (see Table 3.1 in subsection 3.11) is provided on Table 4.1. The basis of this assessment is provided below.

4.3.1 Alternative 1: Maximum Environmental Protection

By limiting development within parts of the Plan area, including those that are most sensitive to development, this alternative would reduce the potential for adverse environmental effects to occur from development within the Plan area¹¹ (although this potential would remain, albeit to a reduced degree) and benefit the protection and management of following environmental components within the Plan area¹²:

- Biodiversity and flora and fauna (including through: applying a buffer around designated sites; restricting any significant development outward from the existing built-up area in the direction of the Poulaphouca Reservoir; rezoning all lands identified as 'Local Biodiversity Areas' as Natural Areas or Open Space; facilitating the rehabilitation of quarry lands adjacent to the settlement; and protecting all mature trees and hedgerows)
- Population and human health (limiting development in certain locations would reduce potential for interactions with human health)
- Soil (as a result of: limiting greenfield development in certain locations; facilitating the rehabilitation of quarry lands adjacent to the settlement; and maximising the protection of County Geological Sites)
- Air (limits in increases in traffic as a result of limiting development in certain locations)
- Water (including as a result of: limiting development in certain locations; and zoning all lands within 50m of watercourses for Natural Areas only)

¹¹ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** - SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

¹² See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** - SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

- Cultural heritage (through: restricting additional development to Protected Structures; and restricting development at all designated archaeological sites)
- Landscape (including as a result of: designating lands visible from the Poulaphouca Reservoir, and lacking in adequate tree cover/screening, as Greenbelt; restricting significant development between the existing sections of the Blessington Inner Relief Road and Glen Ding to preserve views between the existing built-up area and the surrounding landscape to the west; protecting views and prospects with restricted development within the view/ prospect; and facilitating the rehabilitation of quarry lands adjacent to the settlement).

This alternative would allow for development targets to be met within the Plan area, reducing demand and associated potential for dispersed adverse environmental effects to occur as a result of development occurring outside of the Plan area, in areas that are potentially more sensitive, less well-serviced and less-well connected¹³. As a result, the protection and management of environmental components beyond the Plan area would be benefited¹⁴.

By allowing for development targets to be met within the Plan area, this alternative would benefit efforts to maximise sustainable mobility (including associated interactions with air, climate mitigation and human health) and infrastructural and services efficiencies (including associated interactions with population) to a moderate degree¹⁵. New development would have to be accompanied by appropriate levels of infrastructure and services¹⁶.

4.3.2 Alternative 2: Sustainable Transportation

By focusing on delivering travel solutions that support moving people from the private car to the more sustainable modes of walking, cycling and using public transport, and by providing for higher densities, this alternative would benefit efforts to maximise sustainable mobility (including associated interactions with air, climate mitigation and human health) and infrastructural and services efficiencies (including associated interactions with population) to a greater degree¹⁷ and conflict with these efforts to a lesser degree¹⁸.

Dezoning undeveloped greenfield lands, including parts of the Strategic Land Bank (SLB) that is not within 12-minute walking distance of public transport would reduce the potential for adverse environmental effects to occur from development at these locations¹⁹ (although the potential would remain elsewhere, including as a result of new and enhanced transport infrastructure) and benefit the protection and management of environmental components such as biodiversity and flora and fauna, soil and landscape²⁰.

This alternative would allow for development targets to be met within the Plan area, reducing demand and associated potential for dispersed adverse environmental effects to occur as a result of development occurring outside of the Plan area, in areas that are potentially more sensitive, less well-serviced and less-well connected²¹. As a result, the protection and management of environmental components beyond the Plan area would be benefited²².

4.3.3 Alternative 3: Compact Growth

By allowing for development targets to be met within the Plan area, this alternative would benefit efforts to maximise sustainable mobility (including associated interactions with air, climate mitigation and human health) and infrastructural and services efficiencies (including associated interactions with population) to

¹³ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

¹⁴ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **A C S BFF W PHH MA L CH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

¹⁵ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **MA A C PPH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

¹⁶ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **MA A C PHH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

¹⁷ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **MA A C PPH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

¹⁸ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **MA A C PHH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

¹⁹ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** - SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

²⁰ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** - SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

²¹ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

²² See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **A C S BFF W PHH MA L CH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

a moderate degree²³. New development would have to be accompanied by appropriate levels of infrastructure and services²⁴.

Dezoning all undeveloped greenfield lands would reduce the potential for adverse environmental effects to occur from development at these locations²⁵ (although the potential would remain elsewhere, including as a result of town and village centre development and mixed use, high density residential development on infill sites previously zoned for employment uses within the built-up area) and benefit the protection and management of environmental components such as biodiversity and flora and fauna, soil and landscape²⁶.

This alternative would allow for development targets to be met within the Plan area, reducing demand and associated potential for dispersed adverse environmental effects to occur as a result of development occurring outside of the Plan area, in areas that are potentially more sensitive, less well-serviced and less-well connected²⁷. As a result, the protection and management of environmental components beyond the Plan area would be benefited²⁸.

4.3.4 Alternative 4: Housing Market Driven

As a plan developed from this alternative would be in effect for ten as opposed to six years, a fully comparative evaluation cannot be provided.

By providing for

- a. excesses in zoned land (above current targets) and lower densities of housing development
- b. facilitating increases in car dependency and
- c. providing for community and education, employment and active open space uses on the periphery of the residential zoned land,

this alternative would:

- benefit efforts to maximise sustainable mobility (including associated interactions with air, climate mitigation and human health) and infrastructural and services efficiencies (including associated interactions with population) to a lesser degree²⁹; and
- conflict with these efforts to a greater degree³⁰.

This alternative would provide zoning for ten years of housing needs, unlike the other alternatives that would make provisions over a six-year lifespan and be reviewed towards the end of this six-year period. Furthermore, demand would be met through lower densities, requiring a greater extent of lands to be zoned for development. The extent of greenfield development provided and the lack of a focus on infill/regeneration development would present a greater potential for adverse environmental effects to occur from such development within the Plan area under this alternative³¹ and consequently benefit the protection and management of environmental components such as biodiversity and flora and fauna, soil and landscape, in the Plan area to a lesser degree³².

This alternative would allow for development targets to be met within the Plan area, reducing demand and associated potential for dispersed adverse environmental effects to occur as a result of development occurring outside of the Plan area, in areas that are potentially more sensitive, less well-serviced and less-well connected³³. As a result, the protection and management of environmental components beyond the Plan area would be benefited³⁴.

²³ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **MA A C PPH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

²⁴ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **MA A C PPH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

²⁵ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

²⁶ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

²⁷ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

²⁸ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **A C S BFF W PHH MA L CH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

²⁹ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **MA A C PPH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

³⁰ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **MA A C PPH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

³¹ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

³² See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

³³ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

³⁴ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **A C S BFF W PHH MA L CH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

4.3.5 Alternative 5: Community Driven

By focusing on healthy communities, where residents have all necessary facilities and services within short walking/cycling distance of their homes, this alternative would benefit efforts to maximise sustainable mobility (including associated interactions with air, climate mitigation and human health) and infrastructural and services efficiencies (including associated interactions with population) to a greater degree³⁵ and conflict with these efforts to a lesser degree³⁶.

Providing for a strengthened town centre and more opportunity sites for the redevelopment of brownfield sites would help to reduce demand for greenfield development within the Plan area and associated potential for adverse environmental effects to occur from such development³⁷ (although the potential would remain) and benefit the protection and management of environmental components such as biodiversity and flora and fauna, soil and landscape, especially in peripheral parts of the Plan area³⁸.

This alternative would allow for development targets to be met within the Plan area, reducing demand and associated potential for dispersed adverse environmental effects to occur as a result of development occurring outside of the Plan area, in areas that are potentially more sensitive, less well-serviced and less-well connected³⁹. As a result, the protection and management of environmental components beyond the Plan area would be benefited⁴⁰.

4.3.6 Assessment of Alternative 6: Extractive Industry & Economy Driven

By maximising the potential for growth of jobs locally (including prioritising lands in proximity to public transport for employment use to facilitate the sustainable commuting), where workers and resident workers would have all necessary facilities and services within short walking/cycling distance of their workplaces and homes, this alternative would benefit efforts to maximise sustainable mobility (including associated interactions with air, climate mitigation and human health) and infrastructural and services efficiencies (including associated interactions with population) to a moderate degree⁴¹ and conflict with these efforts to a moderate degree⁴². Zoning all quarry lands for extractive industry uses would hinder the sustainable development of other mixed uses at some of these sites, such as Doran's Pit, while the loss of local road objectives through quarry lands, such as the link between Blessington Bridge and the N81, could hinder efforts to improve sustainable mobility.

Although there are environmentally sensitive locations within and adjacent to the Plan area, providing for the economic development of lands within the Plan area, including those associated with existing industries (tourism and quarrying), would help to reduce demand for greenfield development elsewhere and associated potential for adverse environmental effects to occur from such development⁴³ (including effects that could arise in previously undeveloped areas that are more sensitive, less well-serviced and less-well connected⁴⁴). As a result, the protection and management of environmental components beyond the Plan area would be benefited⁴⁵.

³⁵ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **MA A C PPH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

³⁶ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **MA A C PHH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

³⁷ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** - SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

³⁸ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** - SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

³⁹ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** - SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

⁴⁰ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **A C S BFF W PHH MA L CH** - SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

⁴¹ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **MA A C PPH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

⁴² See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **MA A C PHH** SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

⁴³ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** - SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

⁴⁴ See potentially significant adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated: **BFF PHH S A W L CH** - SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

⁴⁵ See significant positive environmental effects, likely to occur: **A C S BFF W PHH MA L CH** - SEO interactions in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Overall Comparative Assessment of Alternatives against SEOs⁴⁶

| Alternative | Likely to Improve status of SEOs + | | | Potential Conflict with status of SEOs - likely to be mitigated - | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | to a Greater degree | to a Moderate degree | to a Lesser degree | to a Lesser degree | to a Moderate degree | to a Greater degree |
| Alternative 1: Maximum Environmental Protection | BFF PHH S W L CH - BFF PHH S W L CH ■■■ | MA A C PPH | | BFF PHH S W L CH - BFF PHH S W L CH ■ | MA A C PPH | |
| Alternative 2: Sustainable Transportation | MA A C PPH BFF PHH S W L CH ■■■ | BFF PHH S W L CH - | | MA A C PPH BFF PHH S W L CH ■ | BFF PHH S W L CH - | |
| Alternative 3: Compact Growth | BFF PHH S W L CH ■■■ | MA A C PPH BFF PHH S W L CH - | | BFF PHH S W L CH ■ | MA A C PPH BFF PHH S W L CH - | |
| Alternative 4: Housing Market Driven | BFF PHH S W L CH ■■■ | | MA A C PPH BFF PHH S W L CH - | BFF PHH S W L CH ■ | | MA A C PPH BFF PHH S W L CH - |
| Alternative 5: Community Driven | MA A C PPH BFF PHH S W L CH ■■■ | BFF PHH S W L CH - | | MA A C PPH BFF PHH S W L CH ■ | BFF PHH S W L CH - | |
| Alternative 6: Extractive Industry and Economy Driven | BFF PHH S W L CH ■■■ | MA A C PPH | BFF PHH S W L CH - | BFF PHH S W L CH ■ | MA A C PPH | BFF PHH S W L CH - |

- = These interactions relate to positive effects on the protection and management of the environment within the Plan area (as a result of directing incompatible development away from the most sensitive areas within the Plan area and focusing on directing compact, sustainable development within the proposed envelope of the Plan area)
- = These interactions relate to the potential for direct adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated (arising from development within the Plan area)
- = These interactions relate to positive effects on the protection and management of the environment beyond the Plan area (as a result of providing development within the Plan area)
- = These interactions relate to adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated, (arising from development occurring beyond the Plan area)

⁴⁶ For more detail on Strategic Environmental Objectives refer to Section 3.11.
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4.4 Selected Alternative for the Plan

The 'Selected Alternative' for the Plan integrates the following components from the six above evaluated alternative scenarios for the Plan:

- from "Alternative 1: Maximum Environmental Protection"
 - The protection to European Sites (SAC and SPA) and NHAs. Include a significant conservation buffer surrounding all sites to enhance the protection of SAC, SPA and NHA sites;
 - Restrict development outward from the existing built-up area in the direction of the Poulaphouca Reservoir;
 - Protect mature trees and hedgerows where they are not on the TPO list;
 - Protection of watercourses in accordance with Inland Fisheries Ireland 'Planning for Watercourses in the Urban Environment' 2020;
 - Protection of landscape;
 - Enhance the protection of views and prospects with restricted development within the view/prospect; and
 - Rezone the majority of lands identified as 'Local Biodiversity Areas' as Natural Areas (OS2) or Open Space (OS1).
- from "Alternative 2: Sustainable Transportation"
 - The Draft Plan facilitates the significant reduction, or removal, of through traffic through the town centre;
 - The Draft Plan facilitates a reallocation of road space in the town centre from car parking to pedestrians and cyclists;
 - The Draft Plan facilitates enhanced pedestrian connections throughout the settlement;
 - The Draft Plan facilitates new pedestrian/cycling links between the existing built-up area and Glen Ding Forest;
 - The Draft Plan facilitates the expansion of the Blessington Greenway around Poulaphouca Reservoir;
 - The Draft Plan facilitates an increase in pedestrian/cyclist permeability between Blessington Main Street and adjacent areas of the built-up area and other areas of zoned land (e.g. Kilbride Road, existing residential areas to west, Doran's Pit, etc.);
 - The Draft Plan facilitates enhanced cycle routes and connections throughout the settlement in line with the Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network 2022, and where required elsewhere; and
 - The Draft Plan facilitates a 'Park and Ride' site adjacent to Blessington Waste Water Treatment Plant.
- from "Alternative 3: Compact Growth"
 - Zone those lands between Newtown Square and the under-construction town park, to the immediate west of the town centre development, for residential development; and
 - All Town Centre sites are zoned for high density mixed use.
- from "Alternative 4: Housing Market Driven"
 - Provide for extra housing units above that of the Core Strategy as 'Priority 2' on the next best lands.
- from "Alternative 5: Community Driven"
 - Extra lands, above the minimum requirement for new schools are zoned close to residential areas;
 - Extra lands are zoned for Community Education (CE) and Active Open Space (AOS) (e.g. for playing pitches, leisure centres/swimming pools, community halls, theatres, cultural facilities, running tracks, landscaped parks, dog parks, all other recreation/ sports etc.);

- New walking routes / cycling routes are designated throughout the settlement, along with routes around the Poulaphouca Reservoir, routes to Glen Ding Forest; and
 - Extra lands are zoned for employment to facilitate people working locally.
- from “Alternative 6: Extractive Industry and Economy Driven”
 - Extra lands, above the minimum requirement to meet a 0.7 jobs ratio, are zoned for employment purposes to maximise the potential for resident workers to work in the settlement, maximise the potential for strategic employment uses to relocate to the settlement, and thus reduce commuting times and unemployment; and
 - Land between the existing built-up area and the Poulaphouca Reservoir are zoned for ‘T – Tourism’ uses, with a buffer from the SPA boundary, to capitalise on the attraction provided by the Blessington Greenway, and to provide accommodation for tourists in an area of lakeside high amenity.

These components emerged from the planning/SEA process having regard to both:

1. The environmental effects which were identified by the SEA and are detailed above; and
2. Planning – including social and economic – effects that were also considered.

An assessment of the ‘Selected Alternative’ against SEOs is provided at Table 4.2. The ‘Selected Alternative’ will help to:

- Maximise the provision of land use zoning and the deliverance of associated travel solutions that support moving people from the private car to the more sustainable modes of walking, cycling and using public transport (including associated interactions with air, climate mitigation and human health) and infrastructural and services efficiencies to a greater degree (improving SEO interactions for **MA A C PPH**), conflicting with these to a lesser degree (potentially conflicting SEO interactions for **MA A C PPH**);
- Maximise positive effects on the protection and management of the environment beyond the Plan area as a result of providing development within the Plan area (improving SEO interactions for **BFF PHH S W L CH**), while helping to minimise adverse environmental effects (if unmitigated) arising from development occurring beyond the Plan area (potentially conflicting SEO interactions for **BFF PHH S W L CH**); and
- Maximise positive effects on the protection and management of the environment within the Plan area as a result of directing incompatible development away from the most sensitive areas within the Plan area and focusing on directing compact, sustainable development within the proposed envelope of the Plan area (improving SEO interactions for **BFF PHH S W L CH**), while helping to minimise adverse environmental effects (if unmitigated) arising from development occurring within the Plan area (potentially conflicting SEO interactions for **BFF PHH S W L CH**).

Table 4.2 Assessment of 'Selected Alternative' against SEOs⁴⁷

| | Likely to Improve status of SEOs + | | | Potential Conflict with status of SEOs - likely to be mitigated - | | |
|--|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | to a Greater degree | to a Moderate degree | to a Lesser degree | to a Lesser degree | to a Moderate degree | to a Greater degree |
| Selected Alternative for the Draft Plan | MA A C PPH BFF PHH S W L CH - BFF PHH S W L CH | | | MA A C PPH BFF PHH S W L CH - BFF PHH S W L CH | | |

■ = These interactions relate to positive effects on the protection and management of the environment within the Plan area (directing incompatible development away from the most sensitive areas within the Plan area and focusing on directing compact, sustainable development within the proposed envelope of the Plan area)

■ = These interactions relate to the potential for direct adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated (arising from development within the Plan area)

■ = These interactions relate to positive effects on the protection and management of the environment beyond the Plan area (as a result of providing development within the Plan area)

■ = These interactions relate to adverse environmental effects, if unmitigated, (arising from development occurring beyond the Plan area)

⁴⁷ For more detail on Strategic Environmental Objectives refer to Section 3.11.

Section 5 Summary of Effects arising from Plan

Table 5.1 summarises the overall environmental effects arising from Draft Plan provisions. The Plan would contribute towards the proper planning and sustainable development of the Plan area and the wider County and the effects are consistent with those identified by the SEA for the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028. The effects encompass all in-combination/cumulative effects arising from implementation of the Plan. The potentially significant adverse environmental effects (if unmitigated) arising from implementation of the Plan are detailed as are residual effects, taking into account mitigation integrated into both the Draft Plan and the Wicklow County Development Plan – see Section 6.

Environmental impacts which occur will be determined by the nature and extent of multiple or individual projects and site-specific environmental factors. Environmental impacts which occur will be determined by the nature and extent of multiple or individual projects and site-specific environmental factors. Strategic Environmental Objective (SEO) codes are taken from Table 3.1.

Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (AA) is being undertaken alongside the preparation of the Plan. The requirement for AA is provided under the EU Habitats Directive (Directive 1992/43/EEC). The AA assesses the effects of the Plan on European Sites designated for certain habitats and species. The emerging conclusion of the AA is that the Draft Plan will not affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network⁴⁸.

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) has been undertaken as part of the preparation of the Local Area Plan. Requirements in relation to SFRA are provided under 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (Department of Environment and Office of Public Works, 2009) and associated Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government Circular PL2/2014. The SFRA has informed both the land use zoning and the written provisions of the Local Area Plan.

⁴⁸ Except as provided for in Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be:

(a) no alternative solution available;
 (b) imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the plan/programme/project to proceed; and
 (c) adequate compensatory measures in place.

Table 5.1 Overall Findings –Effects arising from the Plan

| Environmental Component | Environmental Effects, in combination with the wider planning framework Effects include in-combination effects that are planned for through the wider planning framework including the NPF and associated NDP, the Eastern and Midland RSES, the Wicklow County Development Plan and adjacent Development Plans and lower-tier land use plans. | | | SEO Codes |
|---|--|---|---|------------|
| | Significant Positive Effect, likely to occur | Potentially Significant Adverse Environmental Effects, if unmitigated | Likely Residual Adverse Non-Significant Effects | |
| Biodiversity and Flora and Fauna | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribution towards protection of ecology (including designated sites, ecological connectivity, habitats) by facilitating development of lands (including those within and adjacent to Blessington's core areas) that have relatively low levels of environmental sensitivities and are served (or can be more easily served) by infrastructure and services, thereby helping to avoid the need to develop more sensitive, less well-served lands elsewhere in the Plan area and beyond. Contribution towards the maintenance of existing green infrastructure and associated ecosystem services, listed species, ecological connectivity and non-designated habitats. Contribution towards protection and/or maintenance of biodiversity and flora and fauna by contributing towards the protection of natural capital including the environmental vectors of air, water and soil. Biodiversity and flora and fauna includes biodiversity in designated sites (including European Sites and Wildlife Sites) and Annexed habitats and species (including birds and bats), listed/protected species, ecological connectivity and non-designated habitats (including terrestrial and aquatic habitats), and disturbance to biodiversity and flora and fauna – including terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity and flora and fauna. | <p>Arising from both construction and operation of development and associated infrastructure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of/damage to biodiversity in designated sites (including European Sites and Wildlife Sites) and Annexed habitats and species, listed species, ecological connectivity and non-designated habitats; and disturbance to biodiversity and flora and fauna; Habitat loss, fragmentation and deterioration, including patch size and edge effects; and Disturbance (e.g. due to noise and lighting along transport corridors) and displacement of protected species such as birds and bats. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of an extent of non-protected habitats and species arising from the replacement of semi-natural land covers with artificial surfaces. Losses or damage to ecology (these would be in compliance with relevant legislation). | BFF |

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| Environmental Component | Environmental Effects, in combination with the wider planning framework | | | SEO Codes |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|------------|
| | Effects include in-combination effects that are planned for through the wider planning framework including the NPF and associated NDP, the Eastern and Midland RSES, the Wicklow County Development Plan and adjacent Development Plans and lower-tier land use plans. | | | |
| | Significant Positive Effect, likely to occur | Potentially Significant Adverse Environmental Effects, if unmitigated | Likely Residual Adverse Non-Significant Effects | |
| Population and Human Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of economic growth to encourage retention of working age population and funding of sustainable development and environmental protection and management. • Contribution towards appropriate provision of infrastructure and services to existing population and planned growth by facilitating compact development of lands (including those within and adjacent to Blessington's core areas) that are served (or can be more easily served) by infrastructure and services, thereby helping to avoid the need to develop less well-serviced lands elsewhere in the Plan area and beyond • Contribution towards the protection of human health by facilitating development of lands (including those within and adjacent to Blessington's core areas) that have relatively low levels of environmental sensitivities and are served (or can be more easily served) by infrastructure and services, thereby helping to avoid the need to develop more sensitive, less well-serviced lands elsewhere in the Plan area and beyond. • Contributes towards protection of human health as a result of contributing towards the protection of natural capital including environmental vectors, such as air and water. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential adverse effects arising from flood events. • Potential interactions if effects arising from environmental vectors. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential interactions with residual effects on environmental vectors – please refer to residual adverse effects under "Soil", "Water" and "Air and Climatic Factors" below. | PHH |
| Soil | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution towards the protection of soils and designated sites of geological heritage by facilitating development of lands (including those within and adjacent to Blessington's core areas) that have relatively low levels of environmental sensitivities and are served (or can be more easily served) by infrastructure and services, thereby helping to avoid the need to develop more sensitive, less well-serviced lands elsewhere in the Plan area and beyond. • Contribution towards the protection of the environment from contamination. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential adverse effects on the hydrogeological and ecological function of the soil resource, including as a result of development on contaminated lands. • Potential for riverbank erosion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of an extent of soil function arising from the replacement of semi-natural land covers with artificial surfaces. • Riverbank erosion will continue to occur naturally over time and is likely to be enhanced by climate change. | S |

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| Environmental Component | Environmental Effects, in combination with the wider planning framework | | | SEO Codes |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|-----------|
| | Effects include in-combination effects that are planned for through the wider planning framework including the NPF and associated NDP, the Eastern and Midland RSES, the Wicklow County Development Plan and adjacent Development Plans and lower-tier land use plans. | | | |
| | Significant Positive Effect, likely to occur | Potentially Significant Adverse Environmental Effects, if unmitigated | Likely Residual Adverse Non-Significant Effects | |
| Water | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribution towards the protection of water by facilitating development of lands (including those within and adjacent to Blessington's core areas) that have relatively low levels of environmental sensitivities and are served (or can be more easily served) by infrastructure and services, thereby helping to avoid the need to develop more sensitive, less well-serviced lands elsewhere in the Plan area and beyond. Contributions towards the protection of water resources including the status of surface and groundwaters and water-based designations. Contribution towards flood risk management and appropriate drainage. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential adverse effects upon the status of water bodies and entries to the WFD Register of Protected Areas (ecological and human value), arising from changes in quality, flow and/or morphology. Increase in flood risk and associated effects associated with flood events. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any increased loadings as a result of development to comply with the River Basin Management Plan. Flood related risks remain due to uncertainty with regard to extreme weather events – however such risks will be mitigated by measures that have been integrated into the Plan. | W |
| Material Assets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribution towards appropriate provision of infrastructure and services to existing population and planned growth by facilitating compact development of lands (including those within and adjacent to Blessington's core areas) that are served (or can be more easily served) by infrastructure and services, thereby helping to avoid the need to develop less well-serviced lands elsewhere in the Plan area and beyond. Contribution towards compliance with national and regional water services and waste management policies. Contribution towards increase in renewable energy use by facilitating renewable energy and electricity transmission infrastructure developments. Contribution towards limits in increases in energy demand from the transport sector by facilitating sustainable compact growth. Contribution towards reductions in average energy consumption per capita including promoting sustainable compact growth, sustainable mobility, sustainable design and energy efficiency. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to provide adequate and appropriate waste water treatment (water services infrastructure and capacity ensures the mitigation of potential conflicts). Failure to adequately treat surface water run-off that is discharged to water bodies (water services infrastructure and capacity ensures the mitigation of potential conflicts). Failure to comply with drinking water regulations and serve new development with adequate drinking water (water services infrastructure and capacity ensures the mitigation of potential conflicts). Increases in waste levels. Potential impacts upon public assets and infrastructure. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exceedance of capacity in critical infrastructure risks remain, including due to uncertainty with regard to climate – however, such risks will be mitigated by: measures, including those requiring the timely provision of critical infrastructure, and compliance with the Water Framework Directive and associated River Basin Management Plan. Residual wastes to be disposed of in line with higher-level waste management policies. Any impacts upon public assets and infrastructure to comply with statutory planning/consent-granting framework. | MA |

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| Environmental Component | Environmental Effects, in combination with the wider planning framework Effects include in-combination effects that are planned for through the wider planning framework including the NPF and associated NDP, the Eastern and Midland RSES, the Wicklow County Development Plan and adjacent Development Plans and lower-tier land use plans. | | | SEO Codes |
|---------------------------------|---|---|--|-----------|
| | Significant Positive Effect, likely to occur | Potentially Significant Adverse Environmental Effects, if unmitigated | Likely Residual Adverse Non-Significant Effects | |
| Air and Climatic Factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribution towards climate mitigation and adaptation by facilitating compact development of lands (including those within and adjacent to Blessington's core areas) that are served (or can be more easily served) by infrastructure and services, thereby helping to avoid the need to develop less well-served lands elsewhere in the Plan area and beyond. In combination with other plans, programmes etc., contribution towards the objectives of the wide policy framework relating to climate mitigation and adaptation, and associated contribution towards maintaining and improving air quality and managing noise levels, including through measures relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable compact growth; Sustainable mobility, including walking, cycling and public transport; Sustainable design, energy efficiency and green infrastructure. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential conflict between development under the Plan and aiming to reduce carbon emissions in line with local, national and European environmental objectives. Potential conflicts between transport emissions, including those from cars, and air quality⁴⁹. Potential conflicts between increased frequency of noise emissions and protection of sensitive receptors⁵⁰. Potential conflicts with climate adaptation measures including those relating to flood risk management. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An extent of travel related greenhouse gas and other emissions to air. This has been mitigated by provisions which have been integrated into the Plan, including those relating to sustainable compact growth and sustainable mobility. Interactions between noise emissions and sensitive receptors. Various provisions have been integrated into the Plan to ensure that noise levels at sensitive receptors will be minimised. | AC |
| Cultural Heritage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributes towards protection of cultural heritage elsewhere by facilitating development within the Plan area. Contributes towards protection of cultural heritage within the Plan area by facilitating brownfield development and regeneration. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential effects on protected and unknown archaeology and protected architecture arising from construction and operation activities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential effects on known architectural and archaeological heritage and unknown archaeology however, these will occur in compliance with legislation. | CH |
| Landscape | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributes towards protection of wider landscape and landscape designations by facilitating development within the Plan area. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occurrence of adverse visual impacts and conflicts with the appropriate protection of designations relating to the landscape. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landscapes will change overtime as a result of natural changes in vegetation cover combined with new developments that will occur in compliance with the Plan's landscape protection measures. | L |

⁴⁹ Although road transport interventions would be likely to result in an overall reduction in traffic flows and associated interactions with air, noise and human health, there would be potential for displacement of traffic to lead to localised increases traffic flows and associated localised potential impacts in terms of increased population exposure to air pollutants and/or elevated noise levels, both within the Plan area and beyond.

⁵⁰ Although road transport interventions would be likely to result in an overall reduction in traffic flows and associated interactions with air, noise and human health, there would be potential for displacement of traffic to lead to localised increases traffic flows and associated localised potential impacts in terms of increased population exposure to air pollutants and/or elevated noise levels, both within the Plan area and beyond.

Section 6 Mitigation and Monitoring Measures

6.1 Mitigation

Mitigation measures are measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and, as fully as possible, offset any significant adverse impacts on the environment of implementing the Plan. Various environmental sensitivities and issues have been communicated to the Council through the SEA, Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) processes. By integrating related recommendations into the Draft Plan, the Council has ensured that both the beneficial environmental effects of implementing the Plan have been and will be maximised and that potential adverse effects have been and will be avoided, reduced or offset.

Mitigation was achieved through:

- Strategic work undertaken by the Council to ensure evidence-based planning ⁵¹;
- Considering alternatives for the Plan⁵²;
- The integration of individual SEA, AA and SFRA provisions into the text of the Local Area Plan; and
- The integration of individual provisions into the text of the existing, already in force, County Development Plan.

6.2 Monitoring

The SEA Directive requires that the significant environmental effects of the implementation of plans and programmes are monitored. Monitoring is based around indicators that allow quantitative measures of trends and progress over time relating to the Strategic Environmental Objectives identified at Table 3.1 and used in the evaluation. Monitoring indicators, targets, sources and remedial action is provided at Table 6.1 overleaf.

⁵¹ In preparing the Draft Plan, information relating to various sectors, from different Departments within the Councils and from different bodies and organisations, was gathered and analysed, contributing towards the development of evidence-led Plan provisions. This work included preparing the following documents that are appended to the Draft Plan: a Green Infrastructure Audit; a Town Centre First Plan (prepared by another section of the Council); a Social Infrastructure Audit; and an Infrastructure Delivery Schedule with associated details on implementation.

⁵² Although strategic alternatives in relation to the content of the Plan were significantly limited for the Plan (see Section 4), as part of the Plan preparation/SEA process alternatives for the Plan were considered. These alternatives were assessed by the SEA process and the findings of this assessment informed the selection of alternatives for the Plan, facilitating an informed choice with respect to the type of Plan that was prepared and placed on public display.

Table 6.1 Indicators, Targets, Sources and Remedial Action

| Environmental Component | Indicators | Targets | Sources | Remedial Action ⁵³ |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Condition of European sites | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require all local level land use plans to include ecosystem services and green/blue infrastructure provisions and to have regard to the required targets in relation to the conservation of European sites, other nature conservation sites, ecological networks, and protected species Confirmation of compliance with Plan provisions relating to the protection of European Sites and sustaining resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DHLGH report of the implementation of the measures contained in the Habitats Directive - as required by Article 17 of the Directive (every 6 years)⁵⁴ DHLGH National Birds Directive Monitoring Report for the under Article 12 (every 6 years)⁵⁵ Internal review of local land use plans Internal review of development management / grants of permission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where condition of European sites is found to be deteriorating this will be investigated with the Regional Assembly and the DHLGH to establish if the pressures are related to Plan actions / activities. A tailored response will be developed in consultation with these stakeholders in such a circumstance. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of spatial plans that have included ecosystem services content, mapping and policy to protect ecosystem services when their relevant plans are either revised or drafted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require all local level land use plans to include ecosystem services and green/blue infrastructure provisions and to have regard to the required targets in relation to the conservation of European sites, other nature conservation sites, ecological networks, and protected species | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of local land use plans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review internal systems |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEAs and AAs as relevant for new Council policies, plans, programmes etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Screen for and undertake SEA and AA as relevant for new Council policies, plans, programmes etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of new Council policies, plans, programmes etc. under the County Development Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review internal systems |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Status of water bodies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Included under Water below | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Included under Water below | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Included under Water below |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compliance of planning permissions with Plan measures providing for the protection of Biodiversity and flora and fauna – see County Development Plan Chapter 17 “Natural Heritage and Biodiversity” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For planning permission to be only granted when applications demonstrate that they comply with all Plan measures providing for the protection of biodiversity and flora and fauna – see County Development Plan Chapter 17 “Natural Heritage and Biodiversity” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of development management / grants of permission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review internal systems |
| Population and Human Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of Plan measures relating to the promotion of economic growth as provided for by County Development Plan Chapter 9 “Economic Development” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress in successfully implementing Plan measures relating to the promotion of economic growth as provided for by Chapter 9 “Economic Development” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of progress on implementing Plan objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review internal systems Consultations with DECC |

⁵³ Where remedial action is required, consultations with government agencies (e.g. DECC, DT, EPA, HSE, NPWS, Regional Assembly, Uisce Éireann) may be undertaken in order to confirm causes of any identified changes in the environment and in order to develop appropriate responses.

⁵⁴ Including confirmation with development management that the following impacts have been considered and including use of monitoring data, where available: biodiversity/habitat loss; nitrogen deposition impacts on European sites; recreational disturbance resulting from implementation of tourism and recreation policies and objectives particularly in riparian areas; biodiversity enhancement; and disturbance /visitor pressure impacts of recreation, amenity and tourism development.

⁵⁵ Including confirmation with development management that the following impacts have been considered and including use of monitoring data, where available: biodiversity/habitat loss; nitrogen deposition impacts on European sites; recreational disturbance resulting from implementation of tourism and recreation policies and objectives particularly in riparian areas; biodiversity enhancement; and disturbance /visitor pressure impacts of recreation, amenity and tourism development.

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| Environmental Component | Indicators | Targets | Sources | Remedial Action ⁵³ |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of spatial concentrations of health problems arising from environmental factors resulting from development permitted under the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No spatial concentrations of health problems arising from environmental factors as a result of implementing the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of published information from the Health Service Executive and EPA Internal consultations with the Council's Environment Department | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultations with the Health Service Executive and EPA |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of people reporting regular cycling / walking to school and work above previous CSO figures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the proportion of people reporting regular cycling / walking to school and work above previous CSO figures Progress in successfully implementing Plan measures relating to active travel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSO data Internal review of progress on implementing Plan objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where proportion of population shows increase in private car use above previous CSO figures, the Council will coordinate with the Regional Assembly, the DHLGH, DECC and NTA to develop a tailored response. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of spatial plans that include specific green infrastructure mapping | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require all local level land use plans to include specific green infrastructure mapping | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of local land use plans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review internal systems |
| Soil (and Land) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of population growth occurring on infill and brownfield lands compared to greenfield (also relevant to Material Assets) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain built surface cover nationally to below the EU average of 4% as per the NPF In accordance with National Policy Objectives 3c of the National Planning Framework, a minimum of 30% of the housing growth targeted in any settlement is to be delivered within the existing built-up footprint of the settlement To map brownfield and infill land parcels | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPA Geoportal Compilation of greenfield and brownfield development for the DHLGH Internal review of development management / grants of permission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where the proportion of growth on infill and brownfield sites is not keeping pace with the targets set in the NPF and the RSES, the Council will liaise with the Regional Assembly to establish reasons and coordinate actions to address constraints to doing so. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instances where contaminated material generated from brownfield and infill must be disposed of | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dispose of contaminated material in compliance with EPA guidance and waste management requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of development management / grants of permission where contaminated material must be disposed of | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultations with the EPA and Development Management |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental assessments and AAs as relevant for applications for brownfield and infill development prior to planning permission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Screen for and undertake environmental assessments and AA as relevant for applications for brownfield and infill development prior to planning permission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of development management / grants of permission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review internal systems |
| Water | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Status of water bodies as reported by the EPA Water Monitoring Programme for the WFD | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subject to exemptions provided for by Article 4 of the Water Framework Directive, not to cause deterioration in the status of any surface water or affect the ability of any surface water to achieve 'good status' Implementation of the objectives of the River Basin Management Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPA Monitoring Programme for WFD compliance⁵⁶ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where water bodies are failing to meet at least good status this will be investigated with the DHLGH Water Section, the EPA Catchment Unit, the Regional Assembly and, as relevant, Uisce Éireann to establish if the pressures are related to Plan actions / activities. A tailored response will be developed in consultation with these stakeholders in such a circumstance. Where planning applications are rejected due to insufficient capacity in the WWTP or failure of the WWTP to meet Emission Limit Values, the Council will consider whether it is necessary to coordinate a response with the Regional Assembly, EPA and Uisce Éireann to achieve the necessary capacity. |

⁵⁶ Including monitoring of water quality and nitrogen deposition due to bioenergy and agricultural projects where available
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| Environmental Component | Indicators | Targets | Sources | Remedial Action ⁵³ |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of incompatible developments permitted within flood risk areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimise developments granted permission on lands which pose - or are likely to pose in the future - a significant flood risk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of development management / grants of permission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where planning applications are being permitted on flood zones, the Council will ensure that such grants are in compliance with the Flood Risk Management Guidelines and include appropriate flood risk mitigation and management measures. |
| Material Assets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programmed delivery of Uisce Éireann infrastructure for all key growth towns in line with Uisce Éireann Investment Plan and prioritisation programme to ensure sustainable growth can be accommodated Number of new developments granted permission which can be adequately and appropriately served with waste water treatment over the lifetime of the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All new developments granted permission to be connected to and adequately and appropriately served by waste water treatment over the lifetime of the Plan Where septic tanks are proposed, for planning permission to be only granted when applications demonstrate that the outfall from the septic tank will not – in combination with other septic tanks – contribute towards any surface or ground water body not meeting the objective of good status under the Water Framework Directive Facilitate, as appropriate, Uisce Éireann in developing water and wastewater infrastructure See also targets relating to greenfield and brownfield development of land under Soil and broadband under Population and Human Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of development management / grants of permission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where planning applications are rejected due to insufficient capacity in the WWTP or failure of the WWTP to meet Emission Limit Values, the Council will consider whether it is necessary to coordinate a response with the Regional Assembly, EPA and Uisce Éireann to achieve the necessary capacity. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of people reporting regular cycling / walking to school and work above previous CSO figures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the proportion of people reporting regular cycling / walking to school and work above previous CSO figures Progress in successfully implementing Plan measures relating to active travel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSO data Internal review of progress on implementing Plan objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where proportion of population shows increase in private car use above previous CSO figures, the Council will coordinate with the Regional Assembly, the DHLGH, DECC and NTA to develop a tailored response. |
| Air | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of journeys made by private fossil fuel-based car compared to previous levels NO₂ (Nitrogen Dioxide), PM10 (particulate matter with diameter of 10 microns or less) and O₃ (Ozone) as part of Ambient Air Quality Monitoring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease in proportion of journeys made by car compared to previous levels Improvement in Air Quality trends, particularly in relation to transport related emissions Progress in successfully implementing Plan measures relating to sustainable mobility and travel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSO data EPA Air Quality Monitoring Internal review of progress on implementing Plan objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where proportion of population shows increase in private car use above previous CSO figures, Council will coordinate with the Regional Assembly, DHLGH, DECC and NTA to develop a tailored response. See also entry under Population and human health above |
| Climatic Factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of Plan measures relating to climate reduction targets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For review of progress on implementing Plan objectives to demonstrate successful implementation of measures relating to climate reduction targets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of development management / grants of permission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review internal systems |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute towards transition to a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmation of progress in implementing of Wicklow County Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 and Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where targets are not achieved, the Council will liaise with the Regional Assembly and the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office to establish reasons and develop solutions. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share of renewable energy in transport | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute towards the National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030 sectoral target for transport (RES-T) of 14%, by 2030 (this | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPA Greenhouse Gas Emissions | |

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| Environmental Component | Indicators | Targets | Sources | Remedial Action ⁵³ |
|--------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greenhouse gas emissions | <p>may be increased following a provisional European agreement on 30 March 2023 for a binding overall RES target of at least 42.5% by 2030)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute towards the target of aggregate reduction in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions of at least 51% (compared to 1990 levels) by 2030 (helping to set Ireland on a path to reach net-zero emissions by 2050) | <p>reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of implementation of Plan provisions relating to renewable energy in transport, including facilitating the development of electricity charging and transmission infrastructure | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energy consumption, the uptake of renewable options and solid fuels for residential heating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To promote reduced energy consumption and support the uptake of renewable options and a move away from solid fuels for residential heating | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of journeys made by private fossil fuel-based car compared to previous levels | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease in the proportion of journeys made by residents of the settlement using private fossil fuel-based car compared to previous levels Progress in successfully implementing Plan measures relating to sustainable mobility and travel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSO data Internal review of progress on implementing Plan objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where trends toward carbon reduction are not recorded, the Council will liaise with the Regional Assembly and the Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office to establish reasons and develop solutions. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of people reporting regular cycling / walking to school and work above previous CSO figures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in the proportion of people reporting regular cycling / walking to school and work above previous CSO figures Progress in successfully implementing Plan measures relating to active travel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSO data Internal review of progress on implementing Plan objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where proportion of population shows increase in private car use above previous CSO figures, the Council will coordinate with the Regional Assembly, the DHLGH, DECC and NTA to develop a tailored response. |
| Cultural Heritage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of entries to the Record of Monuments and Places, and the context these entries within the surrounding landscape where relevant, protected from adverse effects resulting from development which is granted permission under the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect entries to the Record of Monuments and Places, and the context of these entries within the surrounding landscape where relevant, from adverse effects resulting from development which is granted permission under the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of development management / grants of permission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where monitoring reveals visitor or development pressure is causing negative effects on designated archaeological or architectural heritage, the Council will work with Regional Assembly, Fáilte Ireland and the National Monuments Service and other stakeholders, as relevant, to address pressures through additional mitigation. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of entries to the Record of Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas and their context protected from significant adverse effects arising from new development granted permission under the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect entries to the Record of Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas and their context from significant adverse effects arising from new development granted permission under the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of development management / grants of permission | |
| Landscape | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of developments permitted that result in avoidable adverse visual impacts on the landscape, especially with regard to landscape and amenity designations included in Land Use Plans, resulting from development which is granted permission under the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No developments permitted which result in avoidable adverse visual impacts on the landscape, especially with regard to landscape and amenity designations included in Land Use Plans, resulting from development which is granted permission under the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal review of development management / grants of permission | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where monitoring reveals developments permitted which result in avoidable adverse visual impacts on the landscape, the Council will re-examine Plan provisions and the effectiveness of their implementation |