



Draft Wicklow Rathnew Draft LAP Amendment Stage Submission - Report

Who are you:	Private Individual
Name:	Maura Barry
Reference:	DWTRLAP-151924
Submission Made	March 25, 2025 8:32 PM

Topic

LAP - Proposed Material Amendments No 26 Submission

Submission

Objection to Proposed Material Amendment No. 26 – Rezoning of Fernhill House Lands, Wicklow Town

To:

Wicklow Town & Rathnew LAP
Administrative Officer, Planning Section
Wicklow County Council
Station Road, Wicklow Town

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to formally object to Proposed Material Amendment No. 26 of the Variation No. 2 to the County Development Plan 2022 - 2028 which proposes the rezoning of approximately 1.4 hectares at Fernhill House, Dublin Road, Wicklow Town, from Community & Education (CE) to New Residential (RN1 and RN2).

This submission outlines planning-based grounds for rejecting the rezoning proposal in the interest of sustainable development, balanced land use, and long-term community resilience.

1. Undermining Community and Educational Land Use

The Fernhill site has a long-established role in Wicklow's community infrastructure, formerly housing the Girl Guides, and is zoned for Community and Education (CE) to support future public needs. Rezoning it to housing removes one of the few remaining central, accessible landbanks suitable for educational, childcare, youth, or civic amenities. The site was identified in the Draft LAP as one of several potential school locations, and its loss would significantly reduce the town's flexibility to respond to future demands for public infrastructure.

2. Inconsistency with Sustainable Development Principles

The proposed rezoning is inconsistent with national and local policies that call for compact, balanced, and sustainable growth. The National Planning Framework (NPF), the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), and the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022–2028 all emphasize the need for integrated development—where residential growth is supported by adequate community services and infrastructure.

Rezoning Fernhill to residential use without ensuring the provision of social and educational facilities contributes to imbalanced development, reducing the availability of land for public amenities and limiting the town's capacity to meet future community needs.

3. Strain on Local Infrastructure and Public Services

Wicklow Town is already experiencing pressure on critical infrastructure, including schools, healthcare services, and recreational facilities. Introducing further housing in this location—without delivering proportional increases in supporting services—will exacerbate existing challenges. Moreover, local residents living adjacent to the site would be directly affected by increased traffic, congestion, and access issues, particularly on the already busy R750 Dublin Road. The proposed new access point lies in close proximity to multiple residential and commercial entrances, heightening the risk of turning conflicts and traffic disruption.

4. Environmental, Visual, and Biodiversity Impacts

The Fernhill site includes a substantial area of mature woodland, currently zoned OS2 (Natural Area) and protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). While this portion is to be retained under the draft LAP, any adjacent development increases the risk of ecological disruption through construction, lighting, human activity, and pressure for future tree removal. The site's steep gradient also presents drainage and erosion concerns and contributes positively to the town's visual amenity as a green buffer along the Dublin Road. Rezoning for residential use could alter the scenic approach to the town, diminishing its landscape character and natural value.

5. Risk of Setting a Broader Precedent

Approving this rezoning could create a precedent for future residential development on other lands currently designated for community and educational use. This would dilute the integrity of the LAP's zoning strategy and could lead to the gradual erosion of vital public land in favour of private development.

6. Limited Assurance from Planning Conditions

Although the amendment includes a Specific Local Objective (SLO-9) requiring Fernhill House to be brought into community use before any residential units are occupied, this offers only limited certainty. The remaining ~0.2 ha CE-zoned portion may prove insufficient to support a meaningful, long-term community facility. Planning conditions are also subject to interpretation, enforcement limitations, and possible future amendment. By contrast, retaining the full CE zoning provides a clear and enforceable framework for ensuring the site is used exclusively for public benefit.

7. No Demonstrated Need for Additional Residential Zoning

The Draft LAP already identifies extensive RN1 and RN2 lands to meet housing targets for Wicklow–Rathnew. There is no clear evidence that rezoning Fernhill is necessary to meet those targets. Residential land supply is not the primary constraint—delivery and activation of existing zoned sites is.

Conclusion

The proposed rezoning of Fernhill House lands under Amendment No. 26 would result in the permanent loss of a strategically located community asset. It is inconsistent with the principles of sustainable planning, would place increased pressure on infrastructure and services, and risks setting a precedent for the erosion of vital public lands. It would also negatively impact local residents, the natural environment, and the town’s visual character. I respectfully urge Wicklow County Council to reject Proposed Amendment No. 26 and retain the existing Community & Education (CE) zoning in full. This approach supports the delivery of inclusive, resilient, and well-served neighbourhoods—ensuring that Fernhill remains available to meet the community’s evolving needs for generations to come.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours faithfully,
Maura Barry.

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