



## Formal Submission to the Wicklow Town/Rathnew Local Area Plan 2025.

### 1.Sports and Recreation/Community Development

The Wicklow/Rathnew Area has a huge deficit in Sports and Recreation facilities when compared with Greystones. Under current population forecasts, this area will have a population very similar to the population of Greystones in the period under consideration.

While Wicklow Town Team are not speaking on behalf of local Sports Clubs, having reviewed the draft document, it is our informed opinion that the proposed Active Open Space zoning in the draft LAP is insufficient for current and future needs, and will not deliver the facilities urgently required under this draft plan.

Based on a recent survey of the existing clubs within Wicklow Town, it is clear that almost all of the clubs are at capacity or closed to membership. It is abundantly clear that all of these clubs require additional space to provide up to date facilities to cater just for the existing population (*without taking into account the current level of development that will further drive requirement for additional facilities*)

Indeed, long established clubs (Inbhear Dee Athletics Club, Wicklow Basketball Club and Rathnew Boxing Club) currently have no home or facilities.

Please note, the submission we are making is based on the facts contained in the following two paragraphs:

#### a) CSO population and statistics.

Year	Wicklow Town	Rathnew	Total
1996	7290	1437	8,727
2002	9355	1441	10,796
2006	10,070	1849	11,919
2011	10,356	2964	13,320
2016	10,584	3370	13,954
2022	12,957	3482	16,439

The above statistics illustrate the level of growth in the population for the areas concerned.

In the period 1996 to the current date, there has been no increase in Sports and Recreational facilities in the Wicklow/Rathnew area despite the population of the Wicklow/Rathnew area having grown by almost 100% in that period.

In the most recent Census 2022 please note the population of this area grew by almost 20% in the period 2016-2022. Most of the population increase is made up of young families, so the need for Sporting & Recreational facilities is even greater to cater for this demographic.

#### **b) Public Infrastructure and Facilities, Community and Recreational Amenity.**

We understand that there is a development levy of €2,200 per house contribution collected for Community and Recreational Facilities under the Development Contribution Scheme. It does not appear that there has been any significant investment in Sports and Recreation/Community Development in the Wicklow/Rathnew area from the monies collected under this scheme.

Based on the level of residential development since the development contribution scheme was adopted in 2015, very significant sums of monies have been collected from developers for community and recreational facilities in the Wicklow/Rathnew area.

We believe it is unsustainable socially to continue to build houses without providing the necessary infrastructure for Sports and Recreation/Community Development.

#### **Zoning of Land**

We note from the draft plan, that an additional 30.1ha has been set aside for Active Open Space. We believe that the zoning for Wicklow Tennis Club, Wicklow Rovers and Wicklow Town Soccer Clubs should be zoned as they were in the 2013/2019 Wicklow/Rathnew Development Plan and not as Active Open Spaces under the current draft development plan (*the re-zoning of these lands for Active Open Space, forms a significant portion of the 30.4ha of additional land proposed to be zoned Open Active Space under the current draft plan*)

We would strongly recommend that the St Patricks GAA Club site at Dunbur Road be zoned for mixed use.

The 2013/2019 development plan for Wicklow/Rathnew zoned as Active Open Space lands which were not then in use as sports facilities. However, after eleven years, practically none of that Zoned land is now in the hands of any Sports club or in Sports/Recreational use. It is clear that this development plan that forecasted the Sports/Recreational need for the area has not delivered anything approaching the required increase in Sports/Recreational facilities for our ever-increasing population. Based on this experience, zoning land as Active Open Space does not mean that the zoned land will be made available or acquired for use by Sports Clubs.

## **Consequences**

The outcome of compelling clubs (Wicklow Tennis Club, Wicklow Rovers and Wicklow Town Soccer Clubs) to maintain their existing facilities at their current location is to consign future generations and new residents in the Wicklow/Rathnew Area to join already long waiting lists. Already these clubs are losing players to Greystones and Arklow. There are over 100 children from Wicklow who now play soccer for Arklow or Greystones because membership of local clubs is closed to them. *(It is to be noted that these nearby towns have better facilities and in some cases all weather pitches which enables members to train there all year round)*

In relation to the response, we had from earlier engagement regarding the current plan, the necessity for locating facilities within the town was stressed. *(The net effect of this thinking is that under the current plan there will be many more traffic miles added because the lack of facilities in the Wicklow/Rathnew area will mean many more parents having no option but to drive their children for Sports and Recreation to Greystones or Arklow)*

## **Solution**

There is an abundance of green spaces around the Wicklow/Rathnew area, and it is unfair to place the burden of delivering solutions solely on Sports Clubs. Increasing populations, with young families need more and more facilities.

To provide these facilities, they need extra land. Most Sports Clubs in the Wicklow/Rathnew area have seen no meaningful increase in their capacity to cater for a population that has almost doubled over the last thirty years. The pressure on these Sports Clubs to provide additional facilities has been increased by the much to be welcomed increase in female sports participation.

It has been possible in the past for your Local Authority to work proactively with local clubs to find ways and means to ensure that land for sports facilities is delivered into their hands in order to develop additional facilities. We would urge Wicklow County Council to engage directly in a meaningful way with all local Clubs and Stakeholders as an essential part of this current LAP process. Indeed, much of the provision of the big Sports Clubs and facilities in our neighbouring Towns, has come about by the direct intervention of Wicklow County Council. This type of intervention is essential to the development of community Sports and Recreational facilities in the Wicklow/Rathnew area.

The LAP provides an opportunity to change the current zones for these clubs to allow them to fund their re-location elsewhere. Wicklow County Council granted planning permission for the new facilities on Greenhills Road for St. Patricks GAA club, on a site which is outside of the current settlement boundary and is not within walking/cycling distance for much of the current population. Likewise, Wicklow Rugby Club is located on the periphery of the town.

It is noted that un-zoned land outside of the settlement boundary can be used by sporting facilities, subject to planning permission. Much of the proposed additional Active Open Space zonings is required to meet the current needs of existing Sports Clubs which have no facilities at all (Inbhear Dee Athletics Club, Wicklow Basketball Club and Rathnew Boxing Club). It would appear there is no capacity within the current settlement area to zone more Active Open Space to allow for expansion or re-location of existing clubs.

## **2) Economic Development-The Need for More Land to be Zoned Industrial/Commercial**

While acknowledging that the LAPs role is limited to land use and development, we feel that a number of small and large existing businesses along the North and South Quays in the town are either under-utilising their premises or are at capacity and which could relocate to sites on the outskirts of the town. This would provide opportunities for the redevelopment of these sites for more suitable town centre uses, e.g. Commercial/Residential/Tourism/Parking. There does not appear to be a clear strategy in the LAP to facilitate businesses that are expanding in this area, which aren't port related to expand elsewhere.

## **3) Coastal Protection**

Another objective of the LAP is to "ensure that the natural coastal defences are protected". This week's meeting of WCC were told that it will be 2030 before works are completed on the Murrough and that public consultation will begin immediately. Based on the current rate of erosion on the Murrough due to storms over the past few years, this objective seems meaningless, as those responsible have advised that works won't be completed until well after the lifetime of the proposed LAP.

We are deeply concerned at the lack of urgency to protect this important social amenity and to protect the Dublin to Rosslare railway line.