



Draft Wicklow Town – Rathnew LAP Submission - Report

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Reference:	DWTRLAP-180639
Submission Made	November 20, 2024 6:23 PM

Topic

Residential Development

Submission

This submission (see attached document) on behalf of Cairn Homes Properties Ltd addresses the residential zoning strategy in Draft LAP with a particular focus on the designation of RN1 Priority 1 lands and RN2 Priority 2 lands.

The submission highlights that while the Draft LAP seeks to incorporate a flexible approach it does not respond to the current housing need and demand, or the strategic role of Wicklow as a Key Town in the Dublin Metropolitan Region.

Cairn homes is concerned that the Draft LAP actually advocates a significant quantum of de-zoning of residential lands contrary to National Planning Policy, the Development Plan Guidelines and Housing for All. The proposed re-prioritisation of zoned land and rezoning to non-residential uses will actually compound the difficulties in the delivery of housing.

File

2289 - WKLAP-Cairn Homes LAP Submission.pdf, 1.84MB

Draft Wicklow Town-Rathnew Local Area Plan 2025

Submission on behalf of Cairn Homes Properties Ltd

20 November 2024



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Document status					
Job Number: 2289					
Job Title: Wickow-Rathnew LAP					
Version	Purpose of document	Authored by	Reviewed by	Approved by	Review date
V0	Working Draft	RH/JB	RH	RH	13/11/24
V1	Revised Draft	RH	JB	RH	19/11/24
V2	Final	RH	JB	RH	20/11/24

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Report Structure	1
2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT – A NEED FOR HOUSING DELIVERY	2
3. REDUCTION IN ZONED RESIDENTIAL LAND	3
4. APPROACH TO RESIDENTIAL ‘PRIORITY 1’, ‘PRIORITY 2’ ZONING AND PHASING IS TOO RIGID	6
5. CONCLUSIONS.....	7
APPENDIX 1 - ZONING ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY.....	12

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Residential Zoning Analysis.....	4
Table 2 Rate of Activation of zoned land by Region/County	5

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Zoned Residential lands in Draft LAP (Source: KPMG FA).....	8
Figure 2 Location of Priority 1 and Priority 2 Zoned lands in Draft LAP (Source: KPMG FA)	8
Figure 3 Proposed Residential Zoned lands under 2013-19 LAP (Source: KPMG FA)	9
Figure 4 Wicklow Town and Rathnew Settlement Boundary 2013 and CSO Boundary.....	9
Figure 5 Zoning Map Draft Wicklow Town-Rathnew Local Area Plan 2025.....	10
Figure 6 Zoning Map - Wicklow Town and Rathnew Development Plan 2013-2019	11

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

MacCabe Durney Barnes has prepared this submission on behalf of **Cairn Homes Properties Ltd** of 45 Mespil Road, Dublin 4, D04 W2F1 in response to the Draft Wicklow Town-Rathnew Local Area Plan (LAP) 2025.

Cairn Homes welcomes the preparation of the Draft Wicklow Town-Rathnew LAP, which will provide an important framework for the development of the town up to 2030 and beyond. The strategic approach proposed in the draft LAP has potentially broad applicability throughout the county. This submission is focussed on strategic policy and residential zoning strategies, rather than specific sites.

This submission sets focuses on the strategic issues of zoning provision and the phased approach to 'Priority 1' an 'Priority 2' Residential Zonings proposed in the Draft LAP.

Cairn Homes is concerned that the Draft LAP actually advocates a significant quantum of de-zoning of residential lands contrary to National Planning Policy, the Development Plan Guidelines and Housing for All. The proposed re-prioritisation of zoned land and rezoning to non residential uses will actually compound the difficulties in the delivery of housing. It is respectfully submitted that while the Draft LAP seeks to incorporate a flexible approach does not respond to the current housing need and demand or the strategic role of Wicklow as a Key Town in the Dublin Metropolitan Region.

1.2 Report Structure

Section 2 of this Draft LAP Submission sets out the relevant strategic policy provisions at national, regional and have a significant influence on the content of the Draft LAP, providing an important benchmark as to whether the LAP has the capacity to deliver on pressing planning, demographic and housing needs for the region. At a national and regional level the government and stakeholders are addressing a housing crisis.

Section 3 provides details of the extent of de-zoning in the own. The Draft LAP in practice will serve to restrict residential development, rather that address the needs and demands for growth in comparison to the expired LAP. Given that the release of priority 2 lands is based on the activation of 75% priority 1 lands.

This submission on the Wicklow Town-Rathnew LAP 2025 is informed by bespoke research commissioned by Cairn Homes on strategic trends in land use and zoning within the LAP prepared by **KPMG Future Analytics**.

Section 4 identifies policy issues concerning the mechanics of policy for Priority 1 and Priority 2 lands and objectives of the Draft LAP could be amended to provide a more proactive transition between the stages.

Section 4 Conclusions summarises the Cairn's position on the document.

2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT – A NEED FOR HOUSING DELIVERY

The Draft LAP is prepared against a context of unprecedented residential demand in the country, with the amended Draft National Planning Framework (November 2024) now recognising a need to construct 50,000 dwellings per annum (National Policy Objective 42) Wicklow County Council acknowledges that the plan preparation is set against a dynamic context of population forecasts and strategic policy evolution, however it does not reflect the town's role as a 'Core Region Key Town' within the Dublin Region.

Chapter 1 of the Draft LAP highlights 'the role of land use plan is to put in place a framework within which development can occur, but does not decide what works actually get done by either private individuals or public bodies'. The Draft LAP acknowledges that the strategic context is dynamic which entails that the LAP employs a degree of flexibility so that it remains applicable in the near and medium term:

On the basis of providing enough housing land to meet the prevailing Core Strategy population and housing targets set out in the County Development Plan at the time of adoption of the LAP, with flexibility in the zoning provisions to ensure that (a) the targets can be achieved in the event that unforeseen impediments to the development of certain lands arise and (b) the LAP does not have to be formally amended to reflect any changes in the Core Strategy or population / housing targets that may arise during the lifetime of the County Development Plan due to changes to the National Planning Framework , Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy or changes to planning legislation .

However, this strategic approach to residential activation is not future-proofed to national demands (including the housing crisis). While intended to incorporate a degree of flexibility, it is in fact based on outdated 2016 Census data used in the County Development Plan, with insufficient lands set for Priority 1 zoning.

The Revised NPF 2024 now plans for a population of 6.1 million by 2040 The increase in population projections over the 2018 NPF effectively require nearly a doubling of households. This results in an underestimation of c. 150,000 persons (or some 60,000 dwellings) expected to reside within the Eastern and Midland Region as currently published in the NPF (2018).

One of the Governments response pillars to the Housing Crisis is **Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland (2021)**. It emphasised (3.1) the need for an 'Increase Land Availability for Residential Development':

By 2040, an additional one million people will be living in Ireland...This is critical to ensuring that the new homes to be built over the next decade are located where housing demand is greatest and where there is good accessibility to employment, education, public transport, and other services and amenities It may be necessary for a Local Authority to zone more serviced land in a development plan than would equate to meeting precisely the projected housing demand for that settlement, to provide choice in sites locally and to avoid restricting the supply of new housing development through inactivity

The Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) (2019-2031) identifies Wicklow Town-Rathnew as a 'Core Region Key Town'. The Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 identifies Wicklow – Rathnew as a as a *Level 2 Core Region Key Town - a growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres*. It is vital that the Draft LAP responds to this regional position and national need for a proactive approach to housing activation.

3. REDUCTION IN ZONED RESIDENTIAL LAND

3.1.1 Population and Housing

The Draft LAP benchmarks population targets set out in the 2022 County Development Plan (based on 2016 census) against 2022 Census in Table 2.1. Although the Draft LAP highlights that take-up of residential lands is progressing rapidly ahead of projected targets, it does not provide for additional zoned lands as may be expected in a new, but in fact reduces the availability.

Table 2.1 Population growth & targets Wicklow Town – Rathnew

Wicklow Town - Rathnew	2016 Census	2022 Census	Q2 2028 Target	2031 Target
Population	13,954	16,439	18,515	19,400
Housing	5,456	6,231	7,573	7,850

The draft LAP notes the following:

As set out in the Core Strategy of the Wicklow County Development Plan, the population target for Wicklow Town – Rathnew up to Q2 2028 is 18,515 and up to 2031 is 19,400 which would require a new housing growth between 2016 and 2031 of 2,392 housing units.

It is important to note in recent years that there has been and is currently a considerable amount of new residential development being built in Wicklow Town – Rathnew. It is likely that through planning permissions for residential development that are both currently under construction and permissions that have not commenced yet, the 2031 population target will be fulfilled well before that date.

The 2031 population target of 19,400 will however be used in demand forecast analysis within the settlement.

In the preparation of the Core Strategy, the Council, did not consider the results of the most recent census, Census 2022 which shows that the population of County Wicklow has grown by around 9.4% between 2016-2022. The 2022 Census enumerated a population of 16,439 persons in Wicklow Town – Rathnew, an increase of 2,485 persons (18%) from the 2016 Census (13,954).

3.1.2 KPMG Future Analytics Review

Research by KPMG Future Analytics demonstrates that the New Draft LAP zones substantially less land for “New Residential” than the previous plan (see Figures 1-3 at the back of this report). KPMG FA has identified that:

- The **Expired LAP zoned 179 Ha** for new residential development land, out of which, approx. 83 Ha of this land is currently under construction or has been delivered, leaving 96.6 Ha remaining zoned.
- From the Draft LAP, we have identified that a further 30 ha has been rezoned, predominantly to Community & Education zoning (20 ha) and open space (10.5 ha).
- Of the remaining **63 ha lands** have been zoned New Residential within the New Draft LAP. Out of which, **approx.. 36 Ha has been designated Priority 2 Lands (RN2). This means that the planning consent will not be granted on these lands until 75% of the 27 ha Priority 1 Residential Lands (RN1) have commenced construction. Based on historic activation rates of zoned land, (discussed further below), it is extremely unlikely that 75% of Priority 1 lands will deliver housing within the lifetime of the LAP. As a result, the Priority 2 designation effectively equates to a ‘de-zoning’ or the equivalent of a ‘Strategic Land Reserve’ designation upon which homes will simply not deliverable over the 6-year Plan cycle. Consequently, of the 96ha**

currently zoned for residential phase 1 in the expired LAP, only 27ha have been retained as phase 1, i.e. a 75% reduction in the quantum of zoned lands. Only an additional 2ha are newly zoned Priority 1 in the Draft LAP.

This research indicates that there is a substantial dezoning on New Residential lands i.e. 66 Ha. This potentially means that there will be shortfall of the order of 2,300 new homes (assuming 35uph).

Table 1 Residential Zoning Analysis

New Residential Zoned Lands in Expired LAP					
179.39 Ha					
2.1 Zoned Lands Activated	2.2 Inactive New Residential Zoned Lands in expired LAP				
82.83 Ha (46%)	96.55 Ha (54%)				
	2.2.1 Rezoned as Community & Education	2.2.2 Rezoned as Open Space	2.2.3 Misc Re-zoning + Unaccounted for		2.2.4 Balance New Residential Zoned Lands within new WTR LAP
	19.84 Ha (21%)	10.48 Ha (11%)	3.08 Ha (3%)		63.15 Ha (65%)
	30.32 Ha		2.2.3.1 Rezoning + Geometry Errors	2.2.3.2 Unaccounted Final*	2.2.4.1 Priority 2 Residential Lands (RN2)
		1.58 Ha (1.57 Ha Rezoning + 0.01 Ha silver Polygons) (51%)	1.5 Ha (49%)	35.93 Ha (57%)	27.22 Ha (43%)

	Priority 2 Residential Lands (RN2)	Priority 1 Residential Lands (RN1)
Expired LAP area review outputs	35.93	27.22
Rezoned to New Residential	13.59	2.14
Total New Residential Land by Priority #	49.52	29.36
Total New Residential Land	78.88	

Source: KMPG FA 2024

3.1.3 Zoning Land Activation

The achievement of the housing requirements of the county depends on 75% of all zoned land being activated, with planning permission granted, all necessary infrastructure provided, and all permitted houses completed on 75% of all zoned land in the county within the 6 year timeline of the plan.

The projections do not have regard to actual or likely land activation and housing completion rates in setting out the extent of ‘surplus’ zoned lands in Table A of the CDP core strategy. We refer to the recent report by Goodbody research¹ which demonstrates that actual activation and housing completion rates are far below 75% of all zoned land in a 6 year period. WCC secured only 20% activation of zoned land over the last LAP period. Therefore the CDP clearly does not meet this key requirement to ensure that the CDP core strategy has made adequate provision for zoned and serviced sites that will come forward during the lifetime of the plan.

¹ Goodbody (September 2024) Residential land availability, an assessment of residential land provision in Ireland

Table 2 Rate of Activation of zoned land by Region/County

Components of Historical Zoned Completion Rate by Local Authority						
NUTS 2	NUTS 3	Local Authority	Plan Period	Housing Yield of Zoned Land	Completions	Annual Completions
Northern & Western	Border	Donegal	2018-2024	7,681	3,261	544
	West	Galway City	2017-2023	9,093	1,459	243
Southern	South-West	Cork City	2015-2021	11,910**	3,392	565
		Cork County	2014-2020	44,077**	6,220	1,037
	Dublin	DLR	2016-2022	33,600	7,082	1,180
		Dublin City	2016-2022	52,450	12,891	2,149
		Fingal	2017-2023	49,541	11,638	1,940
South Dublin	2016-2022	40,143	7,342	1,224		
Eastern & Midland	Louth	Louth	2015-2021	57,418*	3,005	501
		Mid-East	Meath	2013-2019	49,098*	5,556
	Wicklow	Wicklow	2016-2022	27,882*	5,664	944
		Laois	2017-2023	4,848	2,119	353
	Midlands	Longford	2015-2021	2,370*	499	83
		Westmeath	2014-2020	8,254	824	137
Total				398,365	70,952	11,825

20% Actual Activation

Components of Implied Zoned Completion Rate by Local Authority						
NUTS 2	NUTS 3	Local Authority	Plan Period	Housing Yield of Zoned Land	Housing Supply Target (HST)	Annual HST
Northern & Western	Border	Donegal	2024-2030	12,126*	7,678	1,280
	West	Galway City	2023-2029	6,942	4,433	739
Southern	South-West	Cork City	2022-2028	20,461	16,236	2,706
		Cork County	2022-2028	42,798^	22,611	3,769
	Dublin	DLR	2022-2028	22,181	18,515	3,086
		Dublin City	2022-2028	49,175	40,150	6,692
		Fingal	2023-2029	35,001	16,245	2,708
South Dublin	2022-2028	21,490	15,576	2,596		
Eastern & Midland	Louth	Louth	2021-2027	20,525*	6,524	1,087
		Mid-East	Meath	2021-2027	20,581*	16,989
	Wicklow	Wicklow	2022-2028	23,623	8,467	1,411
		Laois	2021-2027	3,948	3,998	666
	Midlands	Longford	2021-2027	2,734*	2,568	428
Westmeath	2021-2027	5,319	4,983	831		
Total				286,904	184,973	30,829

36% Implied Activation

Source: Goodbody 2024 Residential land availability report

The extent of de-zoning in the town reduction on currently zoned Priority 1 lands by comparison to the expired LAP equates to some 2,300 units and is contrary to consistent advice to Councils from Government not to de-zone serviceable zoned lands, which a Priority 2 designation effectively does.

The Minister has directed planning authorities to ensure “.....that there is sufficient zoned and serviced land available at suitable locations to facilitate the development of housing and sustainable communities. In the period pending finalisation and approval of the updated National Planning Framework,²” De-zoning land runs contrary to this objective.

The Development Plans – Guidelines for Planning Authorities (June 2022) state at Section 4.4.1: **that zoned housing land in an existing development plan, that is serviced and can be developed for housing within the life of the new development plan under preparation, should not be subject to de-zoning**”

² Press release 31st August 2024.

4. APPROACH TO RESIDENTIAL 'PRIORITY 1', 'PRIORITY 2' ZONING AND PHASING IS TOO RIGID

The Draft LAP incorporates a Priority zoning strategy that based on sequential land use in accordance with the NPF and Development Plan Guidelines. Its strategy aims inter alia to consolidate the existing built pattern in Wicklow Town by maximising the development potential of large sites close to the core and any infill sites and backland sites. However, the plan acknowledges that brownfield will not deliver on the strategic housing objectives for Wicklow and therefore Greenfield locations must form part of the housing delivery equation.

Cairn Homes submit that flexibility entails allowing a soft transition or interchangeability between Priority 1 and 2 as this does not conflict with core strategy. The LAP's phasing strategy does not account for unforeseen impediments and could rule out significant areas from development. The LAP policy to refuse to even 'consider' development proposals on Priority 2 lands until the over whelming majority of Priority 1 lands are activated is highly restrictive and will fail to secure the quantum of homes required for the reasons set out above concerning the legacy stats for land activation.

The wording of WTR4, residential and phasing policies contradicts and undermines the Draft LAPs overall approach to Priority zoning, and the need to *ensure an adequate future supply of housing lands, should the need arise for their development having regard to any changes to housing targets* and should be amended as follows:

In order to ensure a long term supply of zoned land, in particular to ensure flexibility in the event of an increase in housing targets during the lifetime of this plan, this plan also provides for additional zoned serviced / serviceable residential lands, over and above that needed to meet current targets, zoned 'RN2 – New Residential Priority 2'. Development on foot of Permission will not be considered initiated during the lifetime of this plan for RN2 lands unless the following conditions are satisfied:

- **50% ~~75%~~ of Priority 1 new residential lands (RN1) lands have been activated (i.e. consent obtained ~~and development initiated~~ or it is demonstrated that RN1 sites cannot not be implemented in the short term as Priority 1 and should be assessed as Priority 2 lands;**
- **It can be shown that the housing / population generated by the proposed development would not result in the prevailing Core Strategy targets at the time of the decision to grant permission being significantly breached and that the RN2 lands will deliver residential output in lieu of non-delivery of Priority 1 lands.**

WTR4 Notwithstanding the zoning / designation of land for new residential development (RN), development on foot of permission will not be considered initiated for RN2 Priority 2 lands unless the following conditions are satisfied: - 50% ~~75%~~ of Priority 1 new residential lands (RN1) lands have been activated (i.e. consent obtained ~~and development initiated~~ or it is demonstrated that RN1 sites will not be implemented in Phase1 and should be assessed as Phase 2 lands); - It can be shown that the housing / population generated by the proposed development would not result in the prevailing Core Strategy targets at the time of the application being significantly breached.

RN2: New residential Priority 2: To provide for new residential development and supporting facilities where it can be demonstrated that such development would accord with the Core Strategy housing target for that settlement after the activation of Priority 1 lands (as assessed in accordance with Policy WRT4).

The proposed reduction from 75% to 50% of zoned lands more accurately reflects historic rates of land activation and creates a more robust scenario for the housing needs of Wicklow/Rathnew to be achieved.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Cairn Homes welcomes the broad vision set out in the Draft LAP with an emphasis on creating a place to live, work and recreate in, where communities can be established and flourish.

The Draft LAP acknowledges that the plan preparation is set against a dynamic context of population forecasts and strategic policy evolution and the strategy is clearly intended to incorporate a degree of flexibility in respect changing ESRI, NPF, Regional Planning and County Plan population projections and housing need. Although the Draft LAP highlights that take-up of residential lands is progressing rapidly ahead of projected targets, it does not provide for additional zoned lands as may be expected in a new, but in fact reduces the availability.

Research by KPMG Future Analytics has identified that:

- The **Expired LAP zoned 179 Ha** for new residential development land, out of which, approx. 83 Ha of this land is currently under construction or has been delivered, leaving 96.6 Ha remaining zoned.
- From the Draft LAP, we have identified that a further 30 ha has been rezoned, predominantly to Community & Education zoning (20 ha) and open space (10.5 ha).
- Of the remaining **63 ha lands** have been zoned New Residential within the New Draft LAP. Out of which, **approx 36 Ha has been designated Priority 2 Lands (RN2). This means that the planning consent will not be granted on these lands until 75% of the 27 ha Priority 1 Residential Lands (RN1) have commenced construction, which effectively equates to a 75% reduction in available residential land over the LAP cycle, as the threshold upon which priority 2 lands become available is unrealisable, based on historic rates of activation**

This research indicates that there is a **substantial dezoning on New Residential lands i.e. 66 Ha**. This potentially means that there will be shortfall of 2,300 new homes (assuming 35uph)

The achievement of the housing requirements of the county depends on 75% of all zoned land being activated, with planning permission granted, all necessary infrastructure provided, and all permitted houses completed on 75% of all zoned land in the county within the 6 year timeline of the plan. Research by Goodbody which demonstrates that actual activation and housing completion rates are far below 75% of all zoned land in a 6 year period. WCC secured only 20% activation of zoned land over the last LAP period.

The extent of de-zoning in the town reduction on currently zoned Priority 1 lands by comparison to the expired LAP equates to some 2,300 units and is contrary to consistent advice to Councils from Government not to de-zone serviceable zoned lands, which a Priority 2 designation effectively does.

While the intention of the Priority 1 and Priority 2 to be flexible is appropriate, the wording is in fact restrictive, and does not allow sufficient movement between Priority 1 and 2 areas. Flexibility means allowing a transition or interchangeability between priority 1 and 2 as this does not conflict with core strategy. Amendments to the working of these key policy areas are proposed.

Cairn Homes welcomes the opportunity to engage with the preparation of the Wicklow Town and Rathnew Local Area Plan 2025. As stakeholders with key landholdings in the county, it is submitted that the amendments proposed in this report will be vital to achieving the strategic goals of the plan and the early delivery of sustainable residential neighbourhoods that integrate with the town as it continues to grow. We look forward to continuing to engage with the planning authority in a proactive manner in the next stages of the LAP preparation.

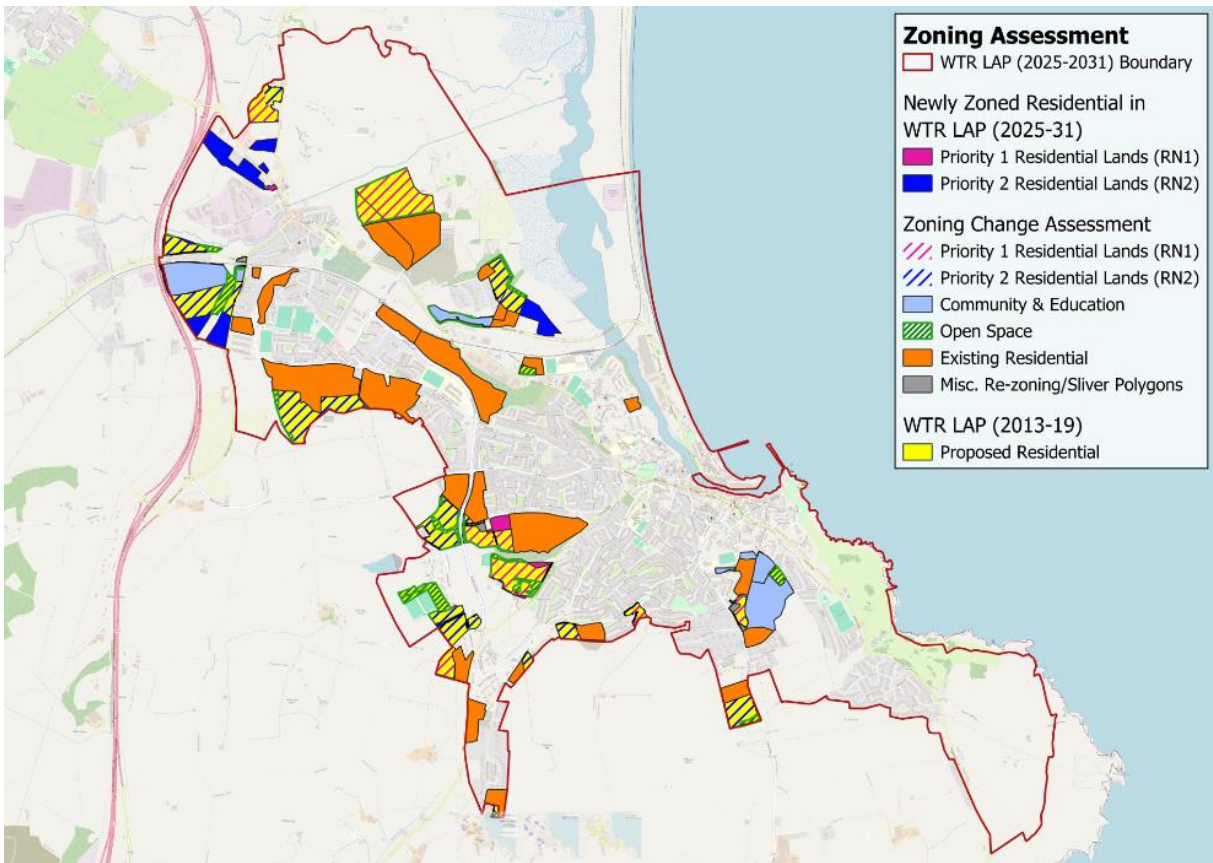


Figure 1 Zoned Residential lands in Draft LAP (Source: KPMG FA)

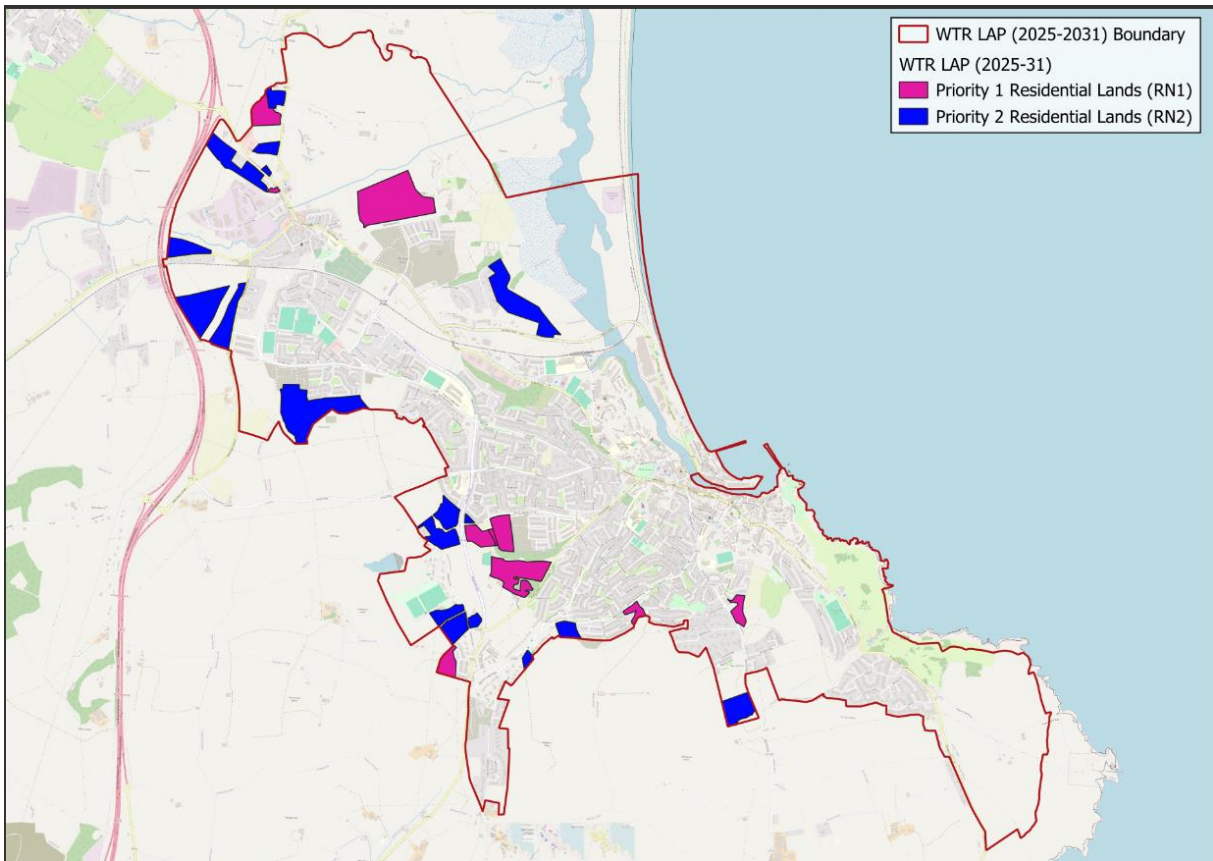


Figure 2 Location of Priority 1 and Priority 2 Zoned lands in Draft LAP (Source: KPMG FA)

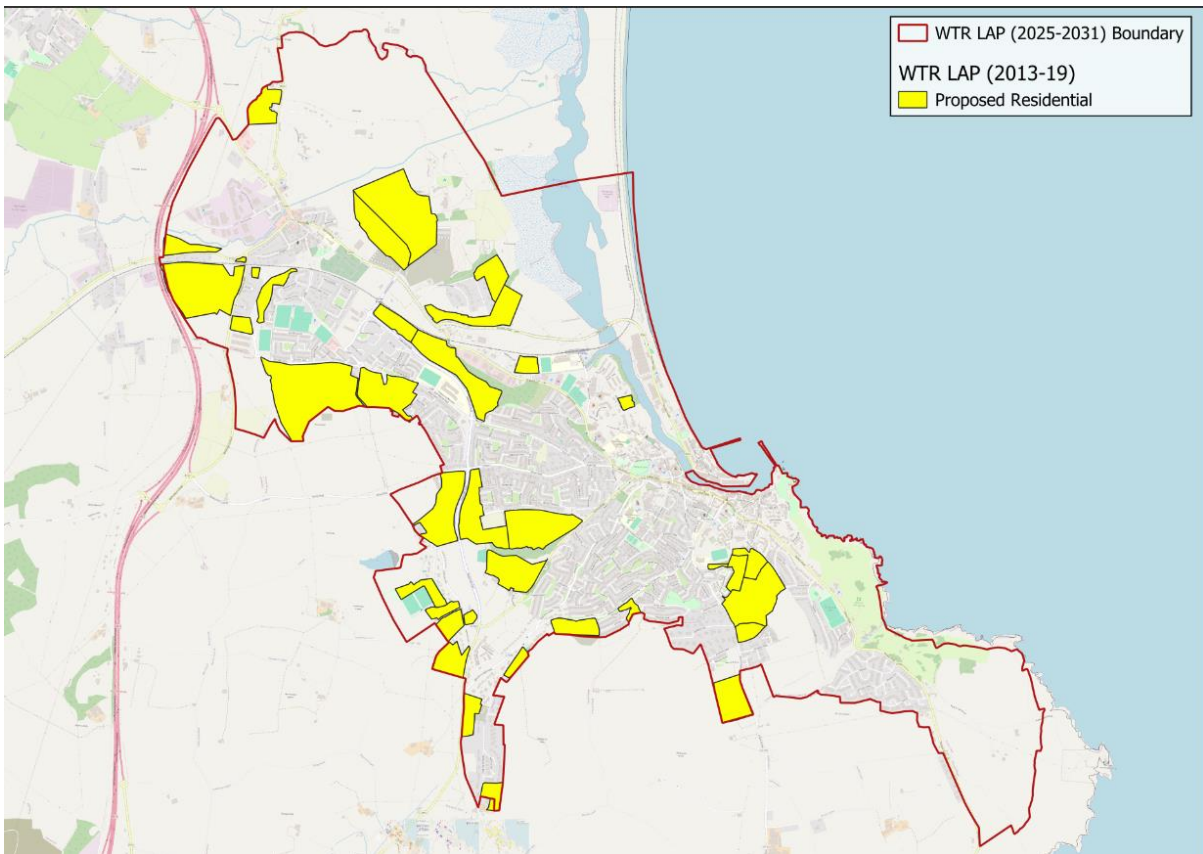


Figure 3 Proposed Residential Zoned lands under 2013-19 LAP (Source: KPMG FA)

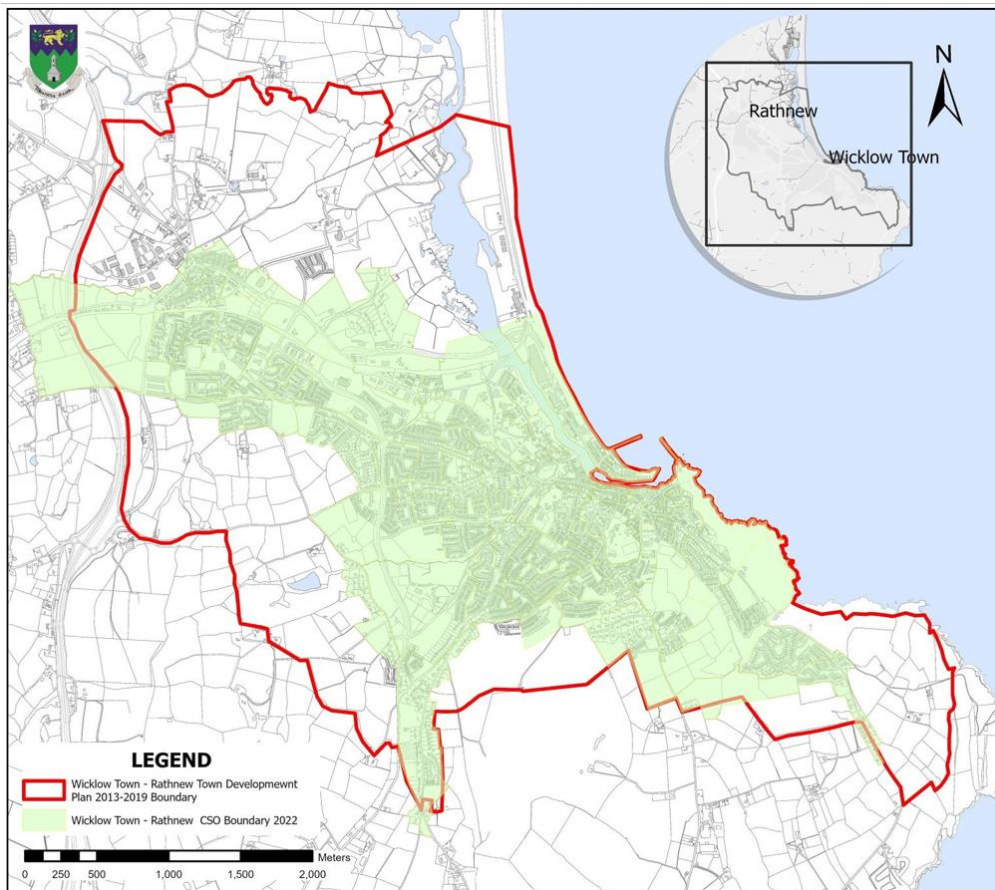


Figure 4 Wicklow Town and Rathnew Settlement Boundary 2013 and CSO Boundary

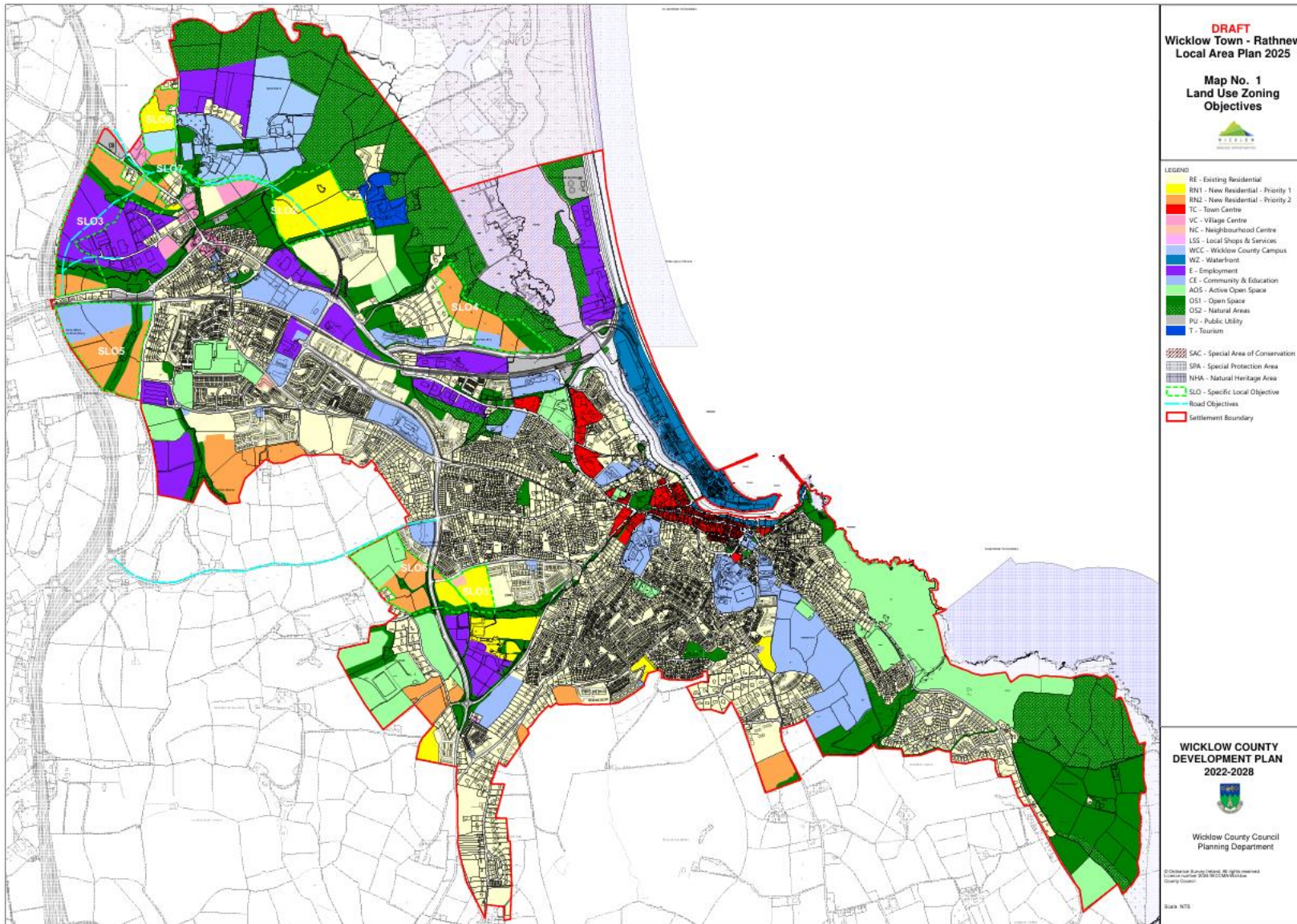


Figure 5 Zoning Map Draft Wicklow Town-Rathnew Local Area Plan 2025

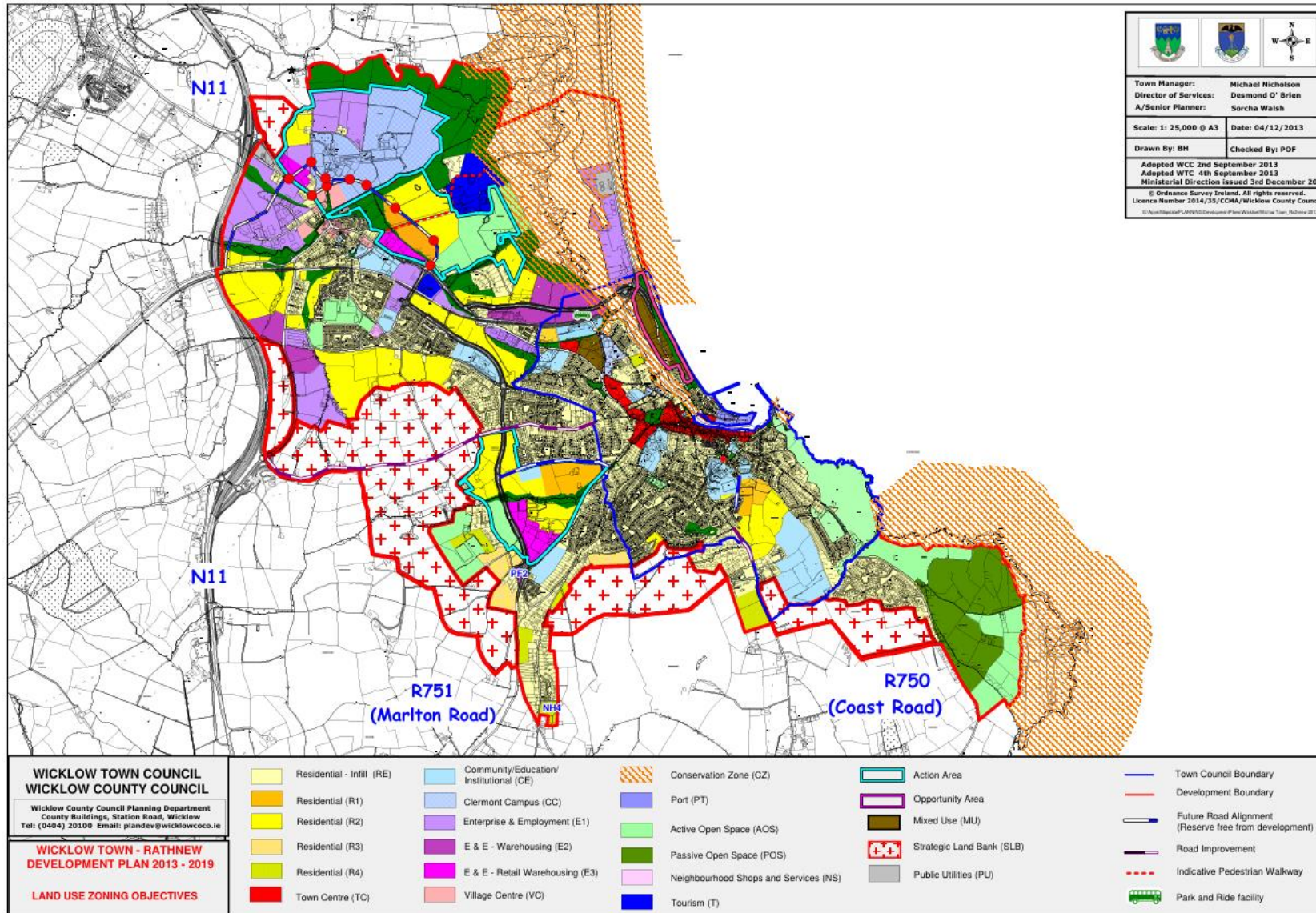


Figure 6 Zoning Map - Wicklow Town and Rathnew Development Plan 2013-2019

Appendix 1 - Zoning Analysis Methodology



Draft Wicklow-Rathnew LAP 2025-2031 Zoning Analysis – KPMG FA Methodology

A GIS-based change-detection approach was implemented to understand how the previously zoned 'Proposed Residential' lands from the *Wicklow Town – Rathnew Local Area Plan 2013-2019* changed over the course of the plan period, and how they were reclassified in the *Draft Wicklow Town - Rathnew Local Area Plan 2025-2031*.

Spatial overlay analysis was used to determine the area intersects between the current and previous layers, which identified the lands previously zoned for 'Proposed Residential' have been brought forward into the Draft LAP in three ways:

1. As 'Existing Residential' areas (i.e., newly completed residential developments)
2. As areas rezoned to other non-residential zoning types (i.e., 'Community', 'Open Space', etc.)
3. As 'Proposed Residential' in the draft LAP (i.e., 'Priority 1' or 'Priority 2' residential lands)

Additionally, further analysis was undertaken to determine the total additional area of 'Proposed Residential' lands zoned within the Draft LAP above the previous LAP.

Spatial Analysis Methodology:

1. **Reclassification to 'Existing Residential' Lands:** The quantum of previous 'Proposed Residential' lands which have been fully developed as residential estates over the 2013-2019 LAP period were first reclassified against the Existing Residential mix.
 - a) The 'Existing Residential' zoning footprint from the 2013-2019 LAP was brought forward for spatial comparison against the previous layers and used to determine the area intersect.
 - b) Using the intersected area as the basis for further assessment, the overall area identified as being activated or developed was then reclassified as 'Existing Residential' taking into consideration any area in use for related roads/infrastructure delivery.
2. **Reclassification to Other Non-Residential Zonings:** From the remaining area of inactive lands, a similar spatial intersect was used to understand quantum of lands that had been rezoned into other zoning types within the Draft 2025-2031 LAP. The largest portion of rezoned area were identified for 'Community & Education' uses, followed by 'Open Space' and other miscellaneous categories (including 'Public Utility', 'Neighbourhood Centres', etc.)
3. **Calculation of Remaining 'Proposed Residential' Lands:** Further spatial analysis of the 2013-2019 LAP lands was then undertaken to review of the quantum of Draft 2025-2031 LAP lands which remained as 'Proposed Residential' and reclassified as 'Priority 1' and 'Priority 2' Residential Lands (c. 63ha in total).
4. **Newly Zoned 'Proposed Residential' Lands:** Finally, a significant portion of the Draft LAP's proposed lands (c. 43ha) were found to have been rezoned from 'Employment', 'Community' or 'Open Space' zonings in the previous LAP to 'Proposed Residential', essentially carving out more residential from previously untapped lands under these categories.

These changes have been represented spatially within the assessment maps which illustrate the changes from the 'Proposed Residential' lands within the 2013-2019 LAP to the 'Priority 1 and 2' lands identified within the Draft 2025-2031 LAP at each stage of the zoning review.



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