



**Submission to the
Wicklow Local Development Strategy**

By

County Wicklow Public Participation Network

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Introduction

The purpose of this submission is to outline the views and ideas of community groups and organisations operating in Co Wicklow in relation to the development of the Wicklow Local Development Strategy 2016-2020.

County Wicklow Public Participation Network

County Wicklow Public Participation Network (PPN) was established in July 2014 under the directive of the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government and in accordance with legislation in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (Section 46). Public Participation Networks were established to be an independent structure that would become the main link through which local authorities connect with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in a process to facilitate communities to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system. Co Wicklow PPN has 127 diverse member groups, some of these groups are networks in their own right. PPN representatives serve as a voice for the community on structures including: the Local Community Development Committee; Housing & Corporate Estate Strategic Policy Committee; Planning & Development Strategic Policy Committee; Transport, Water & Environment Strategic Policy Committee; Community, Cultural & Social Development Strategic Policy Committee; Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee; Wicklow County Childcare Committee; Co Wicklow Children & Young People's Services Committee; Co Wicklow Local Sports Partnership; Wicklow County Tourism Board; Co Wicklow Volunteer Centre; Bray Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force. PPN Representatives strive to ensure that the needs of the community sector are prioritised within local policy processes.

Consultation

At the invitation of the Local Action Group, Co Wicklow PPN Representatives attended the Wicklow LEADER 2016-2020 Public Consultation Meetings in Newtownmountkennedy, Blessington, Aughrim, Wicklow, and Baltinglass in September and October 2015. The information in this submission is a direct result of conversations facilitated by Co Wicklow PPN Representatives at the public meetings. Feedback and inclusion from further member consultation on the first draft of this submission is also included.

This submission categorises the information into the four themes discussed at the Public Meetings i.e. Economic Development, Enterprise Development & Job Creation, Wicklow's Rural Towns & Villages, Social Inclusion, and Rural Environment.

Some of the issues raised are cross cutting and many mirror those highlighted in the Co Wicklow PPN Submission to the Co Wicklow Local Economic & Community Plan. This highlights the importance of an integrated approach in developing and monitoring the final actions.

It should be noted that the two issues that consistently came up in every area and under every topic of conversation were:

1. The lack of public transport and the necessity of a joined up efficient transport service
2. The lack of information on all levels and the need for an information hub that would provide accessible, coordinated information on all services, activities, business, tourist information, and funding opportunities available for the benefit of local residents, visitors and business in the county.

Economic Development, Enterprise Development & Job Creation

Challenges & barriers to growth in the Tourism and Business Sector in Wicklow:

- The lack of public transport appears to be one of the main issues for communities in Wicklow with a significant number of people reporting little to no bus or train service in their local area. This causes hugely negative impacts on many levels.
- Of equal issue is the lack of information in all areas including service provision, recreation & tourism, education & training. Information should be central, coordinated and accessible
- The lack of broadband is restrictive to business
- Wicklow has great potential but it is economically underdeveloped.
- Wicklow needs to sell itself better and its PR improved
- There is little to no branding of Wicklow and poor website branding
- Planning restrictions severely hampers economic growth and farmyard enterprise is constrained
- There are no linkages between tourism products/business, even those that complement each other eg Wicklow is renowned for its walks but there is rarely a shop/place for refreshments along the way.
- Wicklow's proximity to Dublin encourages day trippers rather than people who will stay
- Parking charges put some people off staying and shopping in towns
- There is a lack of relevant training i.e. training that will support the development of skills needed for a particular area
- Lack of planning & business support in small towns
- Regulations and Red Tape are severely restrictive and blocking business start ups
- There is a lack of information, particularly co-ordinated information, and support/mentoring for entrepreneurs
- The risk of losing benefits/regular income impacts negatively on starting up business
- There are barriers in accessing finance for business
- Poor road surfaces put people off travelling
- Lack of opportunities for young people during the school holidays
- The lack of insurance protection is restrictive and causes barriers to development
- There is a lack of accommodation in Blessington and it does not have a focal point e.g a hotel
- Huge lack of parking facilities
- Garda vetting needs to be streamlined - individuals should not have to re-apply for every voluntary post
- Not enough tourist friendly attractions
- The lack of an efficient sewage system (Blessington) is limiting the potential for housing and undermining the viability of the area.
- Shillelagh is very quiet and does not receive any tourism benefits
- Stratford has no shop/café and does not benefit from tourism

Opportunities for Tourism & Business Growth

- Develop a Wicklow Brand
- Promote local showcases, our areas of natural beauty and landmarks
- Realise the potential of our lakes and mountains
- Provision of an improved and efficient Broadband service

- Join up/co-ordinate local businesses & tourism development, encourage & highlight complementarities
- Cushion new business and provide adequate supports if business is unsuccessful encouraging entrepreneurs to try out their ideas
- Develop car parking facilities – encourage the allocation of rural land for car-parking this could create spin-of business such as cafes/refreshment stops or camp sites.
- Develop relevant training, including training for Community Employment Schemes that are specific and address the local needs, as well as supporting participants to be efficient and effective in the positions they take up
- Enhance areas and, once financed and enhanced, maintain them to a high standard. This includes the provision of footpaths and signposting
- Co-ordinate business supports
- Identify what Wicklow has to offer ie. Avoca mines
- Walkways have great tourism potential, sign post them properly-develop the Railway walk in Aughrim.
- Develop a Greenway from Shillelagh to Arklow, like Mayo
- Identify and establish pick up points for bags for people walking and link them with accommodation
- Support Tidy Towns groups – they are key in supporting tourism
- Support the development of Social Enterprise in isolated rural areas such as Vallemount, similar to Rathdangan Village Pantry
- Develop a project to facilitate Deer Hunting/Culling – promote its economic potential
- Follow up on the development of Fogarty's Mill in Aughrim as a focal point
- Co-ordinate community events as corporate/social Enterprise.
- Support the opening of the GAA grounds (Blessington) to wider community
- Develop biking trails in Stranahely Woods
- Establish a shop/café for walkers in the Glen of Immal
- Encourage outdoor sporting activities to encourage people to come down from Dublin
- Develop local business to expand to fill gaps e.g. horse drawn caravans to provide links between tourist accommodation facilities
- Support the development of fishing activities
- Develop a social enterprise that would use local products such as Wicklow Wool

Wicklow's Rural Towns & Villages

Issues & Challenges impacting on people in rural towns & villages in Co Wicklow

- Rural safety – crime - lack of garda resources/ambulance service, extra supports needed for people living alone.
- Lack of secure local employment opportunities (not just CE/Tús schemes)
- Declining populations in rural Wicklow
- Planning restrictions on housing in West Wicklow
- High rates for business set ups/starts in West Wicklow
- Regulatory barriers to private enterprise
- Lack of Rural Transport
- Difficult making local business sustainable
- Lack of services in villages/rural areas, no post offices, no garda stations
- Closing post offices has a domino effect on other business
- Cost of parking
- Rural isolation – can impact negatively on mental health

- Little or no Broadband service
- Little/no opportunities for business development/growth
- Lack of voluntary helpers-same faces
- Success of GAA makes it difficult for other fundraising efforts, groups need to work together more
- No jobs – huge commute for work and school – promotes outside shopping too
- Lack of coordinated knowledge – DSP not informing people of local opportunities for help e.g. Carnew Enterprise Centre provides business start-up support locally
- Lack of public access to computers in town/villages (NB for B&B business)

Solutions and Opportunities

- Improved Broadband Service co-wide
- Establish a one stop information hub to ensure that all services are coordinated and shared
- Networking opportunities locally. Facilitate people to come together and communicate more. Look at models of good practise elsewhere and emulate them
- Support small towns/villages to advertise/promote area in a collective beneficial manner
- Road safety, tarmacadam roads and signpost them to include more safety signs
- Create One Stop Shops E.g. Combine a post office & credit union
- Establish good security interventions e.g. text alerts, CCTV, Homelink (or similar) and roll them out to all areas of the county
- Support for young people to stay in the area
- Support for farming & other rural enterprise. Resource small start- ups
- Need to better inform communities of LEADER
- LEADER play a role in negotiating with various organisations such as WCC ie supporting development
- LEADER work with WCC & Failte Ireland to open up rural areas/areas of natural beauty and support the provision of access. Also work with IFA to get solutions.
- Facilitate the establishment of Cooperative Woodland Producers and develop spin offs such as craft apprenticeships – wood products. Provide continued support to forestry owners
- Develop play/recreation areas/outdoor gyms to attract people and provide social meeting spaces
- Promote better incentives for rural business
- Promote a Share a bus/facility campaign
- Develop a CE scheme of trained drivers for rural transport provision
- Develop of Ballyknocken for stone craft enterprise & sculpture
- Work toward eliminating insurance issues that risk/prevent local development
- Incubation units in Blessington – idle premises available
- The opening up of the GAA grounds (Blessington) to the wider community has tourism potential
- Training for community leaders to support the development of groups & structures for the benefit of the area
- Support social enterprise initiatives, similar to the Tinahely recycling imitative
- Support the IINM (Irish Institute of Naturopathic Medicine) to secure funding to develop a centre to meet service demand.
- Equality proofing all projects/actions to ensure they are socially inclusive

Social Inclusion

Reaching out to Hard to Reach Communities Barriers & Challenges in Rural Communities

- Elderly residents, many of whom live alone, are isolated and fearful, leads to vulnerability
- Rural Bus Transport needed, Lack of transport increases isolation
- Isolation impacts negatively on mental health
- Insufficient social networks
- Geographical spread of the county can be a barrier
- Issue of post offices closure, impacts on service provision and social interaction, especially for older people,
- Challenge in keeping young people in small areas
- Discrimination against Travellers which has led to high unemployment, poor health and accommodation facilities
- Lack of facilities for young people

Actions to Develop the Social Infrastructure of Rural Areas

- Coordinate information provision so that people can access services easily
- Streamline Rural Transport and make it user friendly, facilitating people to get to “social meeting points”
- Support the establishment of a Men’s Shed premises in Blessington and other small areas
- Support the elderly housing initiatives that support people to stay at home, this will also increase employment opportunities
- Support active retirement groups
- Female equivalent of Men’s Sheds are needed
- Establish Drop in centres in small rural communities
- Develop an initiative to provide houses for the homeless that will increase the critical mass in rural areas and provide mutual support
- New people in the community can be valuable, provide a range of activities to target specific audiences
- Initiate a Welcome Weekend /Wicklow of the Welcomes event to welcome people to the area
- Outreach services to hard to reach communities
- Develop Intergenerational opportunities – bridge the gap
- Promotion of non-formal/holistic educational opportunities
- Support/encourage young people to get involved in the community
- Provide meeting points, ensure they are safe spaces for people to engage
- Identify the skills within a community and skill sway similar to the Clonakilty LETS (Local Exchange Trading System)
- Equality proofing all projects to ensure that they are socially inclusive

Developing the Potential of Rural Youth

- Young people need a reason to stay in community – it should be economically viable for them to stay
- Empower young people and provide encouragement & supports post leaving certificate
- Provide better signposting for services for young people
- Provide apprenticeships in targeted labour areas
- Establish Mentorships – encouraging the young in skills such as driving, cabinet making, crafts. Place more value on vocational skills for young people – a balance between vocational and academic skills
- Provide all weather pitches, cafes, and social meeting points for young people
- Support groups/initiatives working on the ground in communities to address specific issues such as underage substance misuse. Provide support to young people at risk.
- Provide training for people to work with young people
- Provide a premises for young people that is multifunctional
- Develop diverse activities for young people including sports, IT, music and drama – less formal activities.
- Provide opportunities for community education – men's sheds type things for young people
- Support intergenerational work it creates a sense of belonging to community
- Some community buildings are being under-utilised, target them, provide grant funding and support to deliver training. Possibly add to the buildings if needed eg a recording studio
- People who receive funding for buildings may not be in the best position to run it, training might help
- Training programs could include Photoshop, design, creative training with broad band. Young people could provide services to locals and people abroad
- Provide work experience in community centres/café starting in Kiltegan with Transition years
- Support young people to plan and manage their own events, event management is a good skill
- Empowering local organisations to have the capacity to include Travellers

Rural Environment

Environmental Protection Improving Biodiversity

- Education is key in creating environmental awareness and protection of natural resources – provide it at local level
- Highlight successful projects prompt with models of good practise
- Promote water harvesting
- Liaise with areas that already have models of good practise
- Develop framework/check-list for projects to ensure that their activities don't damage the environment
- Provide opportunities for community groups to work with schools re biodiversity
- Enforce regulations in addressing pollution issues (Refuse charges are too high) – stop dumping in and around water sources
- Increased support for Pure Project

- Provide quality drinking water
- Highlight and encourage methods to reduce carbon footprint
- Encourage communities to develop initiatives and support them with E.g. water butt demo – supply & fitting
- Provide Education on deer management breeding/controls
- Provide interpretive, education panels on walkways
- Raise awareness of over fertilising and indiscriminate use of Round Up by householders
- Foster a culture where people can value the environment. Implement a programme for communities like Green Flag for schools

Renewable Energy & Reducing Carbon Footprint

- Concern was raised if renewable energy should be the remit of LEADER and that it should perhaps be the responsibility of the Department of the Environment. The concern was that renewable energy projects could be costly and might not provide the best value for rural communities
- Concern was also expressed that the programme might overstretch itself
- Promote Willow Production as biomass for bio energy
- Promote timber as an energy source – Wicklow potential (air dried)
- Improve public transport systems to reduce carbon footprint. Providing rural transport to tourist spots would reduce the use of cars and the need for parking
- Pilot renewable energy projects in community centres and use them as models to educate the community which the centre serves.
- More information and support is needed for home insulation schemes and the use of solar panels as well as providing carbon neutral buildings.
- Research and promote combined energy systems e.g. wind, wave and solar
- Renewable energy is welcome and necessary but not wind turbines in close proximity to people. More consultation is needed by wind turbine companies with the popular view being that wind turbines are better built of shore.
- Encourage companies to buy excess energy from small local producers and tie it into the national grid. There is currently no incentive for people to produce their own energy
- Establish water turbines on rivers. The rivers feeding the lakes has great potential for Blessington, support a feasibility study on developing energy this way
- Promote the use of food digesters
- Promote the establishment of intergenerational community gardens
- Work with European partners to promote their products here to reduce the cost of renewable technologies
- Wicklow has enough water resources to look at developing micro hydro energy systems but this should be researched thoroughly so as not to disrupt natural fish stocks and fresh water pearl mussels
- There is scope for energy conservation through retro-fitting and insulation
- Heat pumps are becoming more economical, highlight their benefits and provide installation grants

In addition

Co Wicklow PPN's experience of the consultations was very positive. People were enthusiastic and the wealth of local knowledge was both impressive and encouraging.

Participants requested that their involvement did not end with the public meetings and they are kept informed of the results of these consultations.