

Administrative Officer,
Planning Section,
Wicklow County Council,
Station Road,
Wicklow Town

24th September 2012

Re: Blessington Draft Local Area Plan

To whom it may concern,

The National Transport Authority (“the Authority”) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Local Area Plan for Blessington. We acknowledge the positive discussions with Wicklow County Council on the overall approach to development in the County, with particular attention paid to the linking of population growth to employment growth in order to foster a higher degree of self-sufficiency in the designated RPG centres, than may have pertained to date.

Context

The current population of the Blessington settlement is just over 5,000 persons. There were approximately 1,200 jobs located in the same area in 2006.

Analysis of the 2006 POWCAR data shows that 67% of work trips from the Blessington ED have their destinations elsewhere, primarily Tallaght, City West, the area around the N7 at Kylemore and the City Centre. For all trips, the mode split for car passenger and car driver combined in 2011 was 65%. However, when one examines trips to work only and removes those persons who both live and work in Blessington, this share rises to 83%, according to the 2006 POWCAR data.

As such, the policy to grow Blessington in a more self-sufficient manner, tying population growth to employment growth, is one which will help meet the objective of reducing car dependency and long-distance commuting and one which the Authority supports.

NTA Comment

The Draft Local Area Plan provides for a total population of 6,750 persons (c.35% growth or c.4% per annum over the period 2011-2019), with an associated provision for an additional 1,325 housing units. Due to this high level of planned growth, it is recommended that a phasing scheme is introduced which emphasises a sequential approach to residential growth from the centre out, over the life of this plan.

In terms of employment, the Authority supports the broad thrust of the Draft Local Area Plan to provide for jobs in Blessington in order to reduce the level of commuting, as highlighted above. The evidence-based approach taken to calculate the extent of land required for employment is also welcomed.

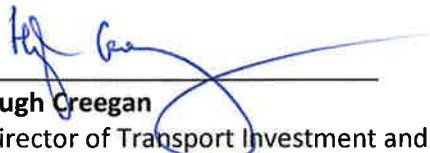
The Authority, however, is concerned with the application of a 100% headroom to the zoning of employment land and recommends that employment zoned lands are designated for development in a phased manner only as extant permissions are realised and Infill Employment Lands identified are developed as set out in Table 4.2.

The Authority welcomes the plan-led approach to the phased provision of schools in tandem with population growth. The location of both proposed school sites, one on the extreme western periphery, and another beside the existing peripheral school adjacent to a major employment zoning, is of some concern. The Authority acknowledges the legacy of previous development patterns but would still encourage the location of primary schools at the centre of neighbourhoods and post-primary schools are at the centre of the town or district, in order to maximise access by walking and cycling from residential areas.

Regardless of the outcome in relation to the location of schools, the Authority recommends that policies are inserted into the plan which state that access by walking and cycling is optimised to the site(s) from the residential areas of Blessington and that drop-off facilities are provided appropriately in order to allow pedestrians and cyclists to access the school safely and conveniently.

We trust that the views of the Authority will be taken in to consideration in the finalisation of the Blessington Local Area Plan.

Yours sincerely,



Hugh Creegan
Director of Transport Investment and Taxi Regulation