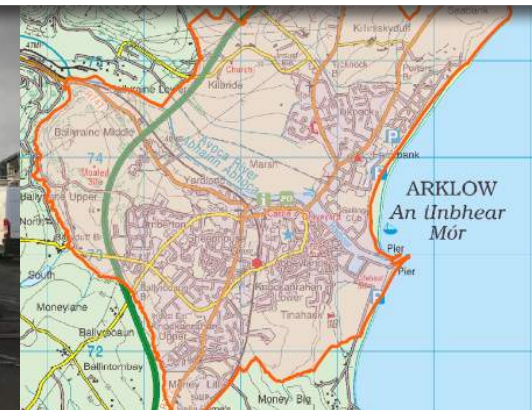




UNLOCKING ARKLOW'S POTENTIAL



Discussion Document compiled by
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Table of Contents

1. Introduction and rationale for the report	2
2. Facts on Arklow	3
3. Unlocking Arklow's Potential	4
<i>Key Priority Areas for Arklow</i>	
• <i>Infrastructure</i>	
• <i>Arklow Public Realm Plan</i>	
• <i>Employment/Retail</i>	
• <i>Tourism</i>	
4. Brand Arklow	20
5. Conclusions	21
6. Acknowledgements	21

Introduction and rationale for the report

After a lengthy consultation process I'm delighted to bring forward this plan. It is a plan of action to put Arklow back on the road to economic recovery.

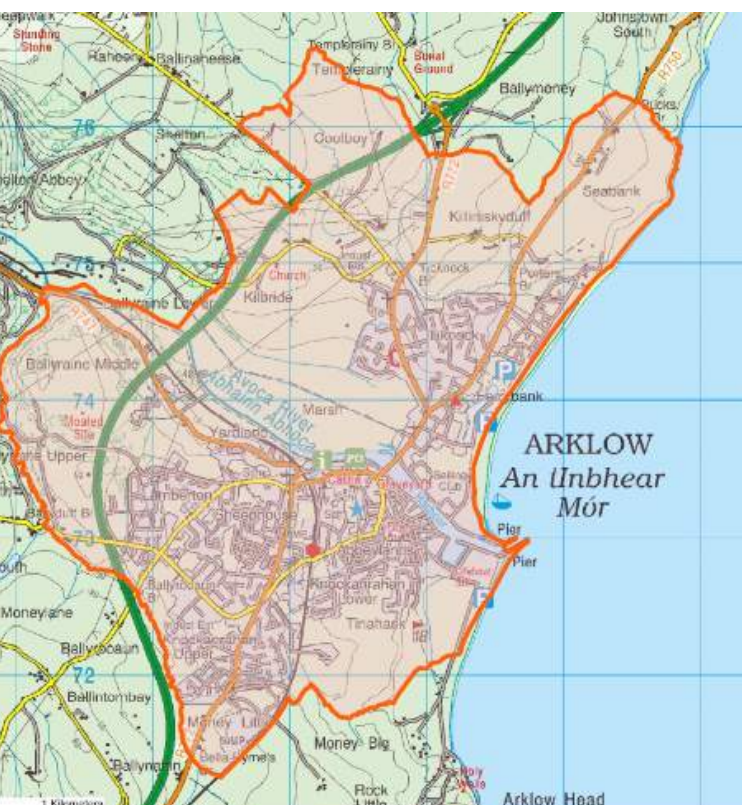
Traditionally Arklow has often been overlooked by the establishment political parties. Unemployment and retail vacancy rates are higher in Arklow than anywhere else in Wicklow. Youth unemployment figures are particularly problematic and an infrastructural deficit has stifled both economic and residential development. Arklow requires strategic focused attention.

The aim of this report is to closely examine Arklow in terms of socio-economic status, enterprise and industry and propose ways in which each of these sectors can be adequately supported to develop further. This report is about identifying specific options that are carefully considered and achievable to assist Arklow in unlocking its potential for the benefit of all the people living in the town and its environs.

This report is set against the backdrop of Arklow's unique economic and geographic realities. A relatively small town with a Significant hinterland. Arklow is in an area that has experienced regional disparities and geographical inequalities after years of focused prioritisation on urban centres elsewhere.

The disadvantage experienced by Arklow is compounded by a high level of unemployment as well as limitations in education, transport and industry.

The report is divided into four main areas. Infrastructure, Enterprise and Industry, Maritime and Tourism.



Several one-to-one consultation meetings have taken place with key stakeholders and interested organisations including, Arklow Local Enterprise Office, Enterprise Ireland, Irish Water and IDA.

A significant public meeting took place, numerous meetings with stakeholders and a large number of written submissions were received. This input was insightful and hugely beneficial in forming the basis of the report's recommendations which are intended to tackle the challenges presented in Arklow with workable solutions. This report uses Census data from 2011 and 2016 where relevant and available.



KEY FACTS ON ARKLOW

The population of Arklow and its environs is 14,353

Over 90% of the total population of Arklow live in urban areas (in or very close to Arklow town) with just 1,386 people living in rural Arklow

There were 6,347 persons aged 15 years and over in the labour force and of these, 71.9% (4,561 persons) were at work. The unemployment rate for this area was 28.1% compared with a national average rate of 19.0%

Of those aged 15 years and over whose full-time education had ceased, 16.4% were educated to at most primary level only; a further 61.2% attained second level while 22.4% were educated to third level.

Socio-economic profile of Arklow

At the end of 2016 there were 2,245 people on the Live Register in Arklow. This is compared to 1,296 people who were on the Live Register ten years previous in 2006. Recent figures from the Central Statistics Office continue to show that youth unemployment is stubbornly high well over the national average of 14%.

Unlocking Arklow's Potential



INFRASTRUCTURE:

The data available around transport links in Arklow raise two very clear challenges. Firstly, there is a very high dependency on cars and private personal transport. Secondly, there is a habitual lack of reliance on public forms of transport. Of course, these two challenges are interconnected and self-perpetuating. However, it must be considered if a more advanced public transport system could provide the necessary services in order to lessen the number of people who self-commute privately. For Arklow to compete with other towns within the region and develop its future potential, the actual existing infrastructure must be equal to Arklow's ambitions for economic expansion and job creation.

THE CRITICAL AREAS IDENTIFIED IN THIS PLAN ARE:

- Arklow Sewage Treatment Plant
- House Building Programme
- Port Access Road
- Slip Road from the M11 onto the Avoca Road
- Deep Sea Port
- Public Transport

ARKLOW SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT

One of the biggest issues curtailing Arklow's economic development has been the failure by successive governments to construct a sewage treatment plant in the town. This has had an impact on new industrial, commercial and residential development taking place in Arklow.

Raw effluent from the entire town still travels through the drainage system which was built in the 1930s. Effluent spews out into the River Avoca untreated via several sewage outfall pipes along the river between the bypass bridge and the Nineteen Arches Bridge, on both sides of the river. The proposed sewage treatment plant was first awarded planning permission in 1993. This was challenged unsuccessfully to An Bord Pleanála. Crucially however no funding arrived from government, and the planning permission was allowed to lapse. A further ten-year planning permission was granted in 1999. Since then it too has been challenged unsuccessfully to An Bord Pleanála. Meanwhile, raw human effluence continues to flow untreated into the River Avoca.

Currently Irish Water in partnership with Wicklow County Council are working to deliver a treatment plant for Arklow to end the current practice of discharging untreated wastewater into the Avoca River.

A site selection process has been undertaken and the Old Wallboard Factory, North Quay, Ferrybank was identified as the preferred site for the new Wastewater Treatment Plant.



• Old Wallboard Factory, North Quay, Ferrybank



The project includes the following:

- A new wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) to treat 36,000 population equivalent.
- Two interceptor sewer pipelines (along North and South Quay) to bring unwanted wastewater to the proposed Treatment Plant.
- A marine sea outfall pipe to safely discharge the treated wastewater effluent to the Irish Sea.

Following the submission of the application for a marine foreshore licence by Irish Water in July 2016, it is expected that the marine site investigation works will begin in 2018 following the granting of the licence. Further updates will be provided once the licence is granted.

It is expected that Irish Water will submit a planning application to An Bord Pleanála, complete with an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 2018. An application for a Wastewater Discharge Licence will be made to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in parallel with the planning application.

This needs to be progressed as quickly as possible as it's the key to unlocking Arklow's full potential.

HOUSING BUILDING PROGRAMME

Due to the lack of critical infrastructure little or no residential development has taken place in Arklow over recent years. With a planning application expected to be lodged to An Bord Pleanála in 2018 for the construction of the new sewage treatment plant, it is critical that in tandem with that process that Wicklow County process and start granting planning applications for residential developments. Conditions can be attached to the permissions that would preclude occupation until the sewage treatment plant is commissioned or that the development would have a temporary waste water treatment plant. This will ensure that there is no further delays in building badly needed social or affordable houses in the Arklow area.

PORT ACCESS ROAD

The development of a port access road linking the Wexford Road (R772) to the South quays and Roadstone must be progressed. This will be via the residential, employment, educational, community zoned land at Tinahask. This will provide a route for HGVs in and out of Arklow Rock quarry. It would also help progress and develop plans to develop a Deep Sea port in Arklow.



- Proposed Port Access Road

SLIP ROAD FROM M11 ONTO AVOCA ROAD

The principal transport routes in the east of the county are the N11 and M11. These serve as the principal access routes to the county. The N11 / M11 route is part of Euro route 01 and has been subject to significant investment. The recently completed Rathnew to Arklow Road Improvement Scheme (PPP scheme) forms part of a 280 km long continuous dual carriageway or motorway between Clogh in County Wexford and Belfast. A Slip Road from the M11 onto the Avoca Road (R747) is urgently required to ease traffic flow through Arklow.



- Proposed slip road on and off the M11 to the R747

DEEP SEA PORT:



To explore the feasibility of developing a deep sea port in Arklow at Arklow Rock and exploit its potential as a load-on load-off port. A Deep-sea port could be a key seaport on the east coast of Ireland and could be developed to service the requirements of all six shipping modes i.e. Lift-on Lift-off, Roll-on Roll-off, Liquid Bulk, Dry Bulk, Break Bulk and Cruise.

Due to its favourable location Arklow is ideally positioned for additional European trading, this is even more relevant now due to Brexit, as well as for yet unexploited direct deep-sea shipping services.

It must also be noted that discussions have taken place around the possibility of moving Dublin Port. Whilst there are no firm proposals in place and whilst we await detailed possible impact studies; should it be a case that Dublin port was to be moved, or should it occur that the port business and traffic be redirected to other eastern seaboard ports, the opportunities and benefits for Arklow cannot be understated.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The east coast of the County is served by the Dublin Rosslare rail line. There are five trains which operate from Rosslare Europort to Dublin City centre daily, and serve Arklow, Rathdrum, Wicklow, Kilcoole, Greystones and Bray stations en route.

Bus Éireann also operates two services (Route 133) each way Monday to Saturday and one service on a Sunday from Wicklow Town to Arklow, servicing Rathnew, Glenealy Rathdrum, Avoca and Woodenbridge.

The public transport service linking Arklow to other areas of the County is very poor. There is scope to introduce a new Bus Éireann Route between Arklow, Wicklow Town and Bray.

This proposal has been put to the CEO of Bus Éireann Ray Hernan and he has said the company is willing to consider a new dedicated route linking Arklow, Wicklow Town and Bray.

The Irish Rail time table is framed around taking people from Arklow to Dublin. The first train to leave Connolly Station in Dublin is at 9.40am. There is no provision for people travelling to work in Arklow. There needs to be a more frequent service in both directions. The train is currently travelling at capacity so additional carriages are needed.



KEY OBJECTIVES:

- New Bus Éireann route between Arklow, Wicklow Town and Bray
- More frequent rail service with additional carriages
- Earlier train departing Dublin to Arklow each morning



ARKLOW PUBLIC REALM PLAN

Arklow Municipal District needs to invest in high quality public realm plan to identify opportunities to enhance the attractiveness of Arklow as a place to live, work and visit, including through ongoing maintenance of roads, footpaths and beaches. The objective of the Public Realm Plan would identify opportunities to underpin its existing qualities via improvements to its public realm. Not only can this process help to strengthen Arklow's standing as a tourist destination, but it can have a direct and positive impact on its business environment and perhaps most importantly, on the quality of life for all who live in the town.

The town centre is the heart of Arklow and a healthy town needs a healthy heart. A key objective should be to build on the positive aspects of the town's natural setting and topography, links to the wider landscape and environs, natural and built heritage, diversity and mix of uses, in order to make it a more attractive place in which to live, work and visit.

- A Public Realm Plan for Arklow should be developed. For the purposes of a plan, streets and open spaces include public pavements, carriageways, squares, parks and car parks (and the links between them). The building fronts enclosing the public spaces contribute much to the life and character of public streets and open spaces should be considered in a plan as an integral part of streets and public spaces.
- There is an opportunity to bring art to the streets of Arklow. Every set of traffic lights in the town has a signal box, most of us haven't even noticed these boxes; their old dull appearance is nothing to admire. These boxes are owned and controlled by the local authority. These traffic signal boxes could be utilised bringing community art to the streets of Arklow, they could be used to showcase the artistic talents of people in Arklow and bring colour into the middle of the town helping to make it more beautiful.



A similar project has been rolled out in Dublin. Dublin Canvas is a community street art project, its main goal to make the city more beautiful, and it has definitely achieved it.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Protection of the visual and historical character of Arklow, which will be crucial to the tourism offering in the town
- Improvements to the physical entrance to the town as a means of enticing casual visitors to engage with the town and its attractions
- Streetscape enhancement, including an investigation of the potential for pedestrianisation, which could help to improve the attractiveness of Arklow for visitors
- Development of designated walking routes, which would help visitors to better understand and interpret the cultural and built heritage in the town
- Further development of the tourism product in Arklow, including the development of festivals and events, which have become a major source of tourism and visitor revenue in towns throughout Ireland
- Development and enhancement of public spaces with the potential to host such festivals and events, such as the space available at Market Square or Arklow Harbour
- Enhancement of the retail offer in the town, including speciality or niche retailing and commercial leisure, as an important component of any tourism offer
- Co-operation between the public sector and private sector in marketing the attractions of Arklow and its qualities as a place to visit
- Identify key public buildings and infrastructure to be illuminated
- Community street art scheme utilising traffic signal boxes

EMPLOYMENT/RETAIL

Job creation, enterprise development and economic growth are central to the development of Arklow and surrounding areas. There can be no sustainable development of Arklow without each of these three key elements.

There were just two IDA visits in the entire Wicklow area during the first half of 2017 despite government promises that they were committed to as wide a dispersal of Government and Foreign Direct Investment. The State must get involved in strategic planning for Arklow as opportunities open up with the construction of the waste water treatment plant, and the availability of land fertile for development.

Lack of suitable office space has been identified as a problem however the IDA have stated that there are greenfield site options in the Arklow Business and Technology Park which could be utilised in the future.

FISHING:

Fishing remains a locally important sector for Arklow. A vision for a sustainable and financially viable fishing sector, resilient to fluctuations in catches/landings and markets, working towards an upturn in sector activity and an increase in employment is necessary. Restrictions on fishing for certain species such as salmon, bass and eel has impacted on the more traditional fishing sectors in the region.



• Arklow Harbour

A revised Common Fisheries Policy could ensure both an increased share of the quota for the Irish fleet and an overall reduction in the catch. There exists considerable resentment within the Irish fishing community at the latitude being given to non-local boats active in Irish waters.

There is potential to expand both employment and value through increasing the catch and by increasing the volume of fish processed locally for sale domestically and for export. Exports nationally are currently valued at around €400 million annually. Given its obvious natural advantages and the fact that the global demand for seafood is forecast to increase greatly over the coming decades, there is huge potential for Arklow to expand its market share if the right strategies are put in place, and in the context of the required reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

RETAIL

Arklow has the highest vacancy rates in Wicklow at 13.9% followed by Wicklow Town and Bray. The creation of a retail strategy is essential for Arklow

Pop-up shops are a regular feature of many town centres these days, especially during busy times such as the run up to Christmas. Pop-up shops are a lower cost option for brands, artists, designers and makers to advertise and sell their goods and services.

The main aims of the Arklow Pop-up Shop initiative would be to reduce the visual impact of empty property in the town centre, increase footfall in the town, create publicity for the area and “offer reduced cost space for community organisations, social enterprise and local business entrepreneurs to try out new ideas and/or reach new audiences”.

The Local Authority should carry out an inventory of all available properties in Arklow.

A new Occupation of Vacant Commercial Premises Incentive Scheme should be brought forward. The Incentive Scheme would be aimed at encouraging the use of vacant commercial premises in Arklow. There are many challenges for businesses trading on the main street in Arklow and the difficulties for new businesses to gain a foothold. The purpose of the scheme is to give an incentive to new aspiring business owners to occupy vacant premises by lowering entry costs through a grant related to the level of rates payable on the property.



By encouraging the occupation of vacant premises it will also support the improvement in the appearance and attraction of the Main Street and thereby will contribute indirectly to increased footfall for existing businesses. The scheme would also encourage increased diversity of business activities and its positive effects on existing businesses.

DEVELOP ARKLOW AS A HUB FOR ARTISAN AND SEA FOOD IN IRELAND

Arklow has a strong tradition as a fishing town; there are also a sizeable number of local artisan food producers. An audit should be carried out to identify local food producers and develop an Arklow artisan food brand. There is potential to use this brand to help tourism and restaurants develop. A food festival should also be considered by the local authority, this will provide an excellent opportunity to develop Arklow as an artisan and seafood hub.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- A new Occupation of Vacant Commercial Premises Incentive Scheme
- Arklow Municipal District should develop an Arklow Pop up shop initiative
- Develop a deep sea port at Arklow Rock
- Support for artisan and local food producers through designated traders, markets and festivals and linkages with tourism and promoting Arklow as a Food Travel destination.
- Extension needed to the Arklow Business Enterprise Centre, Kilbride Industrial Estate, Arklow, Co. Wicklow
- Promote supports for micro-enterprises and other business start-ups, to include development of a tailor 'Finance Options Support Pack' for start-ups and other SMEs, to describe range and accessibility of State and other funding sources including microfinance, development agency and other sources.
- Promote new and existing sectoral-focussed incubation facilities for new start-ups, which also provide mentoring and shared services support on site.
- Arklow Municipal District to leverage EU co-funding under ERDF Urban Development Fund and other EU programmes to support investment in Arklow town centre.
- Develop Arklow as a hub for artisan and Sea food in Ireland

TOURISM

This plan recognises the economic value of festivals such as Seabreeze and tourism generally, in terms of economic activity generated and jobs created.

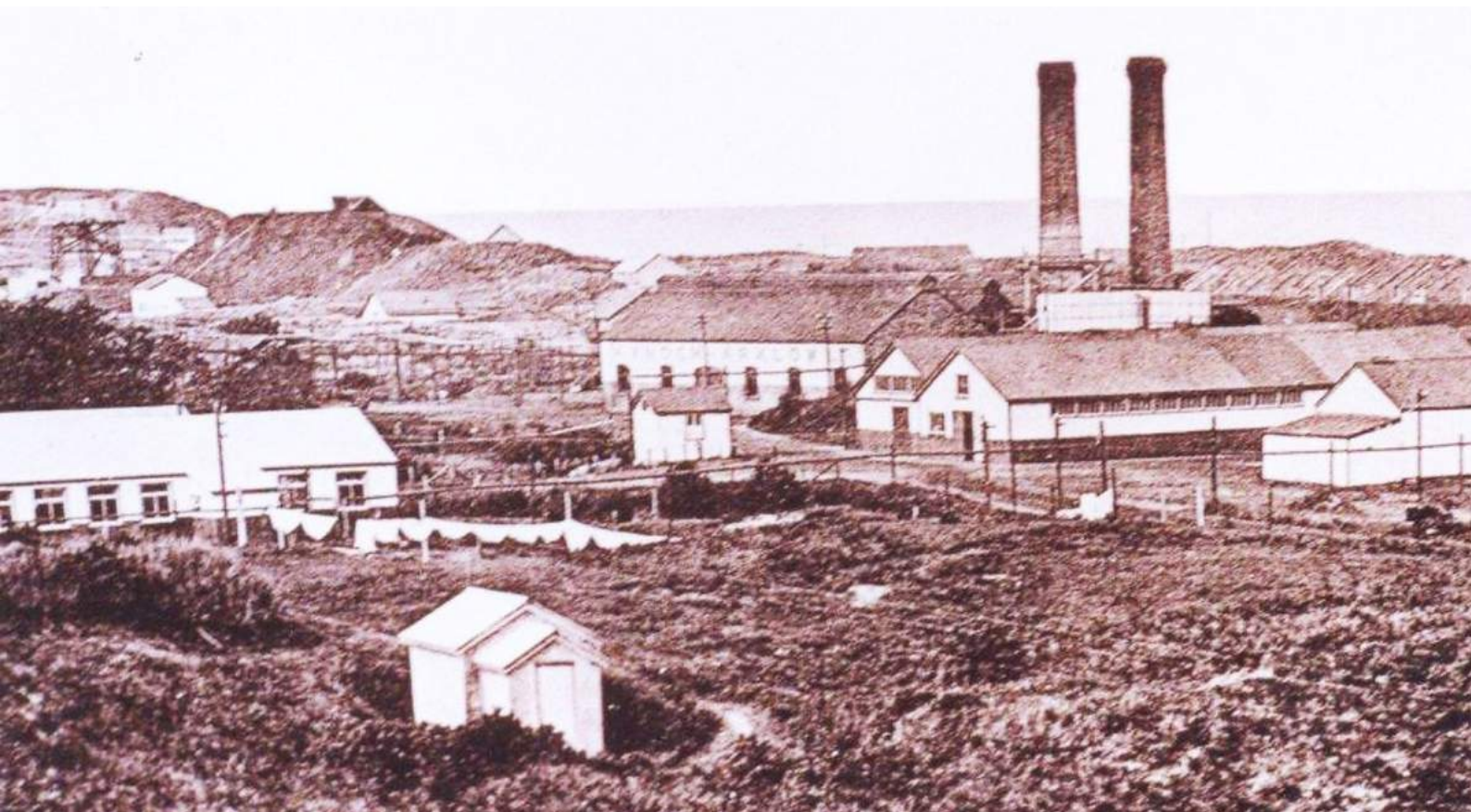
We need to convince Tourism Ireland of the benefit of marketing Arklow to overseas markets as a distinct brand through the Irelands Ancient East campaign.

There is also tremendous potential to promote and develop eco-tourism in the Arklow area, including developing further walking or cycling trails.

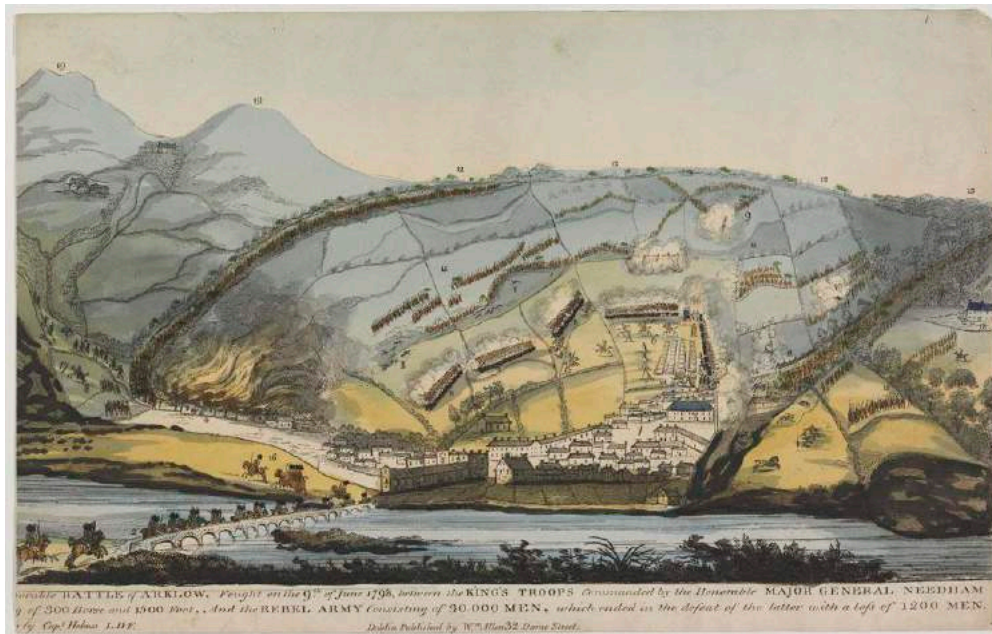
HERITAGE TOURISM

Heritage tourism can include cultural, historic and natural resources.

Arklow also has a proud history, this covers the industrial development of Arklow including Arklow Pottery and Kynoch's which was located in the town from 1895-1918. Arklow also played a significant role in the struggle for Irish freedom, in the 1798 Rebellion a major battle took place in Arklow; this would become known as the Battle of Arklow. A plan should be developed to promote heritage tourism in the Arklow area, this should include the potential of developing walks taking in these sites should be developed.



• Kynoch's Factory in Arklow which closed in 1918



• Battle of Arklow 9th June 1798

ARKLOW GREENWAY

The Shillelagh to Woodenbridge branch railway followed the Aughrim River in the beautiful Vale of Avoca, Co. Wicklow. The line opened on 22 May 1865 but closed for passenger and goods traffic on 24 April 1944 and finally closed altogether on 20 April 1945. The section from Woodenbridge to Aughrim however remained open until 1953. Woodenbridge was the junction on the Dublin Rosslare railway Line for the Shillelagh branch. Shillelagh village was planned as part of the Fitzwilliam estate in the 17th century.



• Shillelagh to Woodenbridge Railway line before it closed in 1944

There has been talk recently to reopen Avoca railway station which is on the Dublin to Rosslare Line. Passenger services were withdrawn here on 3 March 1964, almost 101 years after its opening, on the Dublin-Rosslare railway line on 18 July 1863.

A section of this disused railway line has been redeveloped as a walking route called the 'Tinahely Railway Walk'.



The Railway Walk at Tinahely was opened in September 2007. It runs along part of the original train track from Woodenbridge to Shillelagh, alongside the Derry River and through pretty farmland. 2.3km in length, the walk has some picnic tables along the way, and a clearly defined path suitable for wheelchairs and sturdy buggies.



*Railway bridge on the Tinahely Railway Walk



Tinahely Railway Walk Extension: The extension runs from Tinahely Railway Carpark in the Aughrim and is 2km in length. The project was 75% funded by County Wicklow Partnership through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: "Europe investing in Rural Areas". The remaining 25% was funded locally.

This launch represents the end of the second phase of the re-development of the old Shillelagh to Woodenbridge railway line which was closed in 1964. This re-development has seen the construction to date of 5km of walking trail which has been enjoyed by walkers of all age groups. This is a partnership project between Tinahely Community Projects, the local landowners and agencies such as County Wicklow Partnership, Wicklow County Council, FAS and Coillte.

DEVELOP ARKLOW MARSH INTO A LOCAL AMENITY

MARSH Project – The Members of Arklow Municipal District met with the Marsh Committee on the 12th July last. The issue of an entrance on to the Marsh remains the stumbling block for this project to commence. The Acting District Manager undertook to look at the legal status of using an entrance of the Dublin Road, this information is awaited. There is also the possibility of having some of the work done as part of the Flood Relief Scheme which should be completed by 2020. As plans for the Flood Relief Scheme progress it will become clearer what, if any, works can take place as part of the scheme that will assist the Marsh Committee with their project.

Develop the Arklow marsh into a local amenity with walking trails and boardwalks.

Arklow Town Council has allocated €50,000 towards the cost of developing the marsh

When completed, the marsh trail will have 3km of walking path incorporating the existing Shelton Avenue paths which pass through the woodlands towards the bypass. The remaining part of the old railway bed that was used to bring ore from the Avoca Mines to the port of Arklow in the nineteenth century will also be used.

ARKLOW POTTERY MUSEUM

Arklow is known for its great pottery tradition from the days of “Arklow Pottery” and subsequently “Noritake Pottery” and there are still some former employees of both factories living in the town. A new pottery museum would be a tremendous tourist attraction for the town and would bring life back to Arklow. A catalyst for the renewal of the centre of the town, specifically the lanes that link the main street with the waterfront. The museum will be located at Abbey Lane, this is the pedestrian lane which runs from the Carpark at Castlepark, down by the former Bolands Hardware yard, and emerges onto Main Street adjacent to the Bridge. It is envisaged that this link will revitalise the empty retail spaces in the lanes into arts and craft shops and speciality shops.

The building has been purchased and is in a prime location to achieve these aims. Further funding in the sum of €150,556 has been received which will allow the project to progress as planned.

Quotations are currently being sought for an Architect to design the museum. An Archaeological study has also to be conducted. The building will also house an Arts and Crafts centre along with the museum.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Develop a Greenway from Arklow to Coolattin Park, near Shillelagh - this walk will link up with the Tinahely Railway Walk.
- Develop the Arklow marsh into a local amenity with walking trails and boardwalks.
- Support the development of a Heritage and Craft centre in Arklow which could cater for an Arklow Pottery Museum.
- Support festivals and work towards getting funding from Fáilte Ireland
- A plan should be developed to promote heritage tourism
- Create a Historical walk around Arklow

BRAND ARKLOW

Town branding, as any other type of branding, is highly important - having a well-established Arklow brand will allow the town to be recognised and differentiated from a brand or brands of one's competitors. And the competition between countries is global. It has been established, that building and maintaining a strong town brand produces long-term strategic benefits in a number of segments: increased interest in town culture; tourism income; a range of business and foreign investment opportunities; interest in specific destination within the town; creation of new jobs and other factors. A brand increases the efficiency of marketing actions and increases the turnover. All these factors should be the driving force that motivates Arklow to develop or improve our attractiveness and marketing and promote the towns uniqueness.

A strategy needs to be developed to enhance Arklow's image and openness to attract new business. This needs to incorporate a plan to enhance Arklow's online presence. The web page for Arklow Municipal District needs to be regularly updated with relevant local information

A new logo should be developed to put brand Arklow on the map, once again, as a destination for business, leisure, shopping and tourism alike.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- A plan to enhance Arklow's online presence
- A new logo should be developed for brand Arklow





CONCLUSIONS

This plan offers some ideas and ways in which I feel that Arklow can grow. I hope this document will serve as a conversation starter for the people of Arklow and all those who wish to see it develop and thrive in the months and years to come.

I wish to acknowledge the good work the Arklow Municipal District are doing and also the fantastic work that the Town Team are engaged in. They have identified some key projects and are actively engaged in delivering them. Projects such as the hanging basket scheme and the lighting up of Arklow Bridge have had a positive impact on the town. Delivering free Wi-Fi on the Main Street is also a huge achievement.

We need to ensure party politics is left to one side and that the development of Arklow is priority for all. A number of the proposals that I have brought forward are immediately deliverable by the local authority, others would need substantial investment at a national level. I would hope that all public representatives at both local and national levels could unite around some of the proposals and lobby Government for funding.

Arklow is a great town with great people; it has so much potential that unfortunately has been held back. If working together we could deliver sections of this plan, it would move Arklow forward positively and help create sustainable employment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

My sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed
in different ways to this document.



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