

NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE IS FRANK ABOUT WICKLOW

These are ambitious times in Wicklow County Council as new Chief Executive Frank Curran gets to grips with his new role. With over 3,400 people now on the social housing waiting list in Wicklow, he tells Deirdre O'Flynn that the council is keen to reduce the number through its building programme.

As with the rest of the country, housing is a priority in Wicklow and the local authority has already turned the sod on a new housing scheme of 20 houses in Rathdrum.

This is the first of a development programme of direct build social housing, which will provide accommodation for almost 200 households on the council's social housing list in the near future.

Over 3,400 people are on the social housing waiting list in Wicklow and the council is keen to reduce the number through its building programme, and delivery of new units through Part V units on new developments and units being delivered in partnership with approved housing bodies (AHBs).

"Ninety-eight Part V units have been approved and planning granted, and 192 are at pre-planning stage," said Curran, who came to Wicklow in September, after three years at the helm of Leitrim County Council.

REBUILDING ACTION PLAN

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government has also dedicated €300 million towards delivery of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan. Wicklow has been included as a project in Bundle 1 – the Action Plan's Public Private Partnership (PPP) model; a development site at Convent Lands in Wicklow has been earmarked for this.

Wicklow County Council is also liaising with AHBs under the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF). "Five units were provided under a CALF lease to Co-operative Housing on Greenpark Road in Bray," said Curran.



Various projects are at planning stage including redevelopment of Avondale House in Rathdrum and developing greenway projects around Blessington Lakes.



Housing Minister Eoghan Murphy pictured at a recent sod-turning ceremony for new social houses in Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow.

“And approval has been sought from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government for a leasing arrangement with Clúid Housing to provide 45 units of accommodation on the council’s site in Ballybeg, Rathnew. A new CALF project with Tuath Housing was

also approved in September for 32 units at Bollarney North, Wicklow Town.”

In addition, expressions of interest were invited from AHBs earlier this year to submit proposals to develop on the council-owned land at the Central Garage site in Bray. These initiatives plus the

FACTFILE – FRANK CURRAN

Frank Curran is the former Chief Executive of Leitrim County Council, a position he held for over three years. In September 2017, he succeeded Bryan Doyle as Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council, who took on the role on a temporary basis following the retirement of Eddie Sheehy in 2015.

Curran served as a Director of Services with Waterford County Council from 2007 to 2014, as Senior Executive Officer from 2004 to 2007 and Senior Executive Engineer from 2002 to 2004. Prior to that he served in various management and engineering positions in Kilkenny, Tipperary and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Councils.

He is a Civil Engineering Graduate of University College Dublin and holds an MA in Local Government Management and MSc in Environmental Protection.



Significant plans are in place for the €30m Florentine Centre in Bray, to rejuvenate the north Wicklow town’s urban centre.



HOMELESSNESS CRISIS LOOMS OVER WICKLOW

The homelessness crisis has loomed large nationwide in the past number of years and Wicklow is no different with 145 individuals and 183 families presenting as homeless as of 19 October 2017, with seven families and four individuals in emergency accommodation.

“Wicklow County Council owns properties in Wicklow, Bray and Arklow, which are leased to AHBs, and provide 22 units of low to medium-supported accommodation targeted to the particular support needs of the clients,” said Curran.

Funding of over €3 million has been approved to purchase and refurbish Carraig Eden in Greystones, (includes €150,000 Wicklow County Council funding).

The council is to enter into a lease agreement with Tiglin which will ensure that the long-term needs of the facility’s residents will be addressed by their progression into sustainable, long-term tenancies via the various social housing supports available.

In addition, all of those served with notices to quit the council-owned Fairfield Park in Greystones in 2016 have been transitioned through a mix of sourcing private rented accommodation with HAP and RAS, successful referrals to AHBs, allocation of some social housing units, and temporary accommodation from family pending Social Housing Support.

Fairfield Park had provided private rented accommodation to households since 1973 and, after issuing the notices to quit, the council immediately and proactively engaged with the landlord and the residents, according to Wicklow’s chief executive. “We engaged the services of a housing support worker from the Dublin Simon Community to work with council staff in the provision of tenancy sustainment and housing support services,” he added.

A site clinic was also set up to facilitate the residents, many of whom were elderly and/or infirm and resident in Fairfield Park since the 1970s.

In addition, four units for people under the category of Homeless/At Risk of Homelessness were purchased by an AHB under the 2016 Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS). These were allocated in May 2017 with one further unit to be allocated.

Additional units are due to be delivered for people with disabilities under this scheme, with a call for units under the 2017 CAS recently advertised by Wicklow County Council.

resurgence in the private housing market are welcomed, but Curran is keen to stress the importance of also building sustainable communities and economic development.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

He points to collaboration with community-based organisations such as Age Friendly, Comhairle na nÓg, the Public Participation Network, the Sports Partnership and Town Teams in terms of helping the council to develop strong communities throughout the county.

Wicklow’s economic infrastructure is also under the spotlight, not an easy feat in a county that is simultaneously a commuter belt for Dublin and also features remote, hard-to-reach areas in west Wicklow and the Uplands.

“It’s a diverse county, with a Dublin influence, rural west Wicklow and south Wicklow bordering Wexford and Carlow. Developing a cohesive county identity is important.

“We also need strong planning policies,” said Curran, adding that Bray and Arklow local area plans are being undertaken currently.

“We’re also looking at offering solutions in the high-tech and social media sector and liaising with the IDA and Enterprise in terms of attracting companies to set up in the County.”

Significant plans are in place for the Florentine Centre in Bray, to rejuvenate the north Wicklow town’s urban centre. “The council has acquired it and has planning permission for shops, restaurants, cafes, a six-screen cinema – this is a €30 million project.”

TOURISM ON TRACK

Tourism remains a significant business driver in Wicklow and a new tourism strategy for 2017-2022 is in the pipeline to make recommendations for maximising bed nights, building on Ireland’s Ancient East, improving our festivals and events, develop recommendations for marine tourism, walking trails, food and beverage, and spiritual tourism.

Various projects are at planning stage including the redevelopment of Avondale House in Rathdrum, and developing greenway projects including around Blessington lakes.





Brendan Martin, County Librarian, and Wicklow County Council CEO Frank Curran, pictured at the launch of the new library building in Wicklow Town in late October. It will cost over €3m to renovate the former Ulster Bank building at the Upper Mall into a library, including the acquisition costs. The property has been vacant since 2015 when the Ulster Bank branch in Wicklow town closed.

Social Housing Support as at October 2017

No. on list for Social Housing Support – (includes RAS and HAP)	3,488
No. availing of Rental Assistance Scheme (RAS)	516
No. availing of Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)	348
No. in Long Term Leasing accommodation	7
No. in Short Term Leasing accommodation	4

Source: Wicklow County Council

Allocation of Social Housing as at October 2017

WCC Social Housing	26
Approved Housing Bodies	5 plus 4 pending

Source: Wicklow County Council

Housing Supply – Programme of Delivery

12 schemes approved €35.5 million

Scheme	Units	Status as at October 2017
Brewery Bends, Rathdrum (Phase 2)	20	Commenced
Delany Park, Arklow (Phase 1)	17	Commencing October 2017
Kilbride Lane, Bray (Murphy's Lands)	42	Tender documents being prepared
Farrankelly, Greystones (Phase 2)	23	Part 8 September 2017
O'Byrne Road, Bray	1	Tenders received – Reviewing submissions
Delany Park, Arklow (Phase 2 + 3)	25	Design stage (consultants)
Sugarloaf View, Kilmacanogue	20	Part 8 adopted – proceeding to tender stage
FCA Hall, Wicklow Town	8	Detailed design being prepared
Kilmantin Place, Bray	4	Detailed design being prepared
Ard Na Mara, Kilcoole	2	Detailed design being prepared
Druids Brook, Kilcoole	2	Detailed design being prepared
Old Library, Arklow	7	Detailed design being prepared

Source: Wicklow County Council

Ironically, though at opposite sides of the country, many of the issues facing Wicklow – such as broadband access - also made their way to Curran's desk when he was CEO in Leitrim County Council. Not surprisingly, perhaps, he will draw on his experiences in Leitrim, the smallest county in Connaught.

"In terms of tourism, we developed a blueway from Carrick-on-Shannon to Lough Allen and walking and cycling trails off that. We also worked with a local group in Drumshanbo in order to develop a food hub – food

incubation units for whole food production, and these could also be developed in Wicklow. In terms of business, The Hive Innovation Centre in Carrick-on-Shannon could be replicated in Greystones and Bray."

For Curran, it's a question of overseeing the development of Wicklow as a place to start and grow a business, live and work, visit and stay. This will be personified by a new web portal to communicate the new Wicklow brand, which is expected to be launched towards the end of 2017. So, watch this space!