

Wicklow People 13th June, 2012

By: ESTHER HAYDEN

Murrough under threat from Dunne's changes

CLLR. GARRETT O'REILLY claims last minute amendments to the draft Wicklow - Rathnew Development Plan 2012-2019 could have a detrimental impact on the Murrough.

However, Cllr. Gail Dunne has defended his amendment, stressing that he wanted to see a 'balance' between jobs and the environment.

The draft still states it is the council's objective to 'facilitate the continued operation of established/permitted existing businesses/commercial activities' but Cllr Dunne's amendment replaces the original wording 'in so far as can be accommodated given the overriding objective to protect the environment and ecological value of the area' with 'and the development of new employment facilities in this area.

'To resist any developments (including intensification, development of new buildings etc) that would result in any degradation of the visual amenities of the area; has also been changed to 'to encourage business to develop in a manner in which is respectful of the local environment, use environmentally friendly/innovative technologies and improve the visual amenity of the area.'

Cllr. Dunne's amendments were made at Wednesday's Town Council meeting as members considered the proposed draft document. They were passed with six councillors voting in favour, one abstaining (Cllr. Irene Winters) and two votes against, Cllr. O'Reilly and Cllr. Pat Kavanagh.

'Tourism is the future of Wicklow, and in the Murrough we have a beautiful bit of coastline which inland towns could only dream about. The original wording in the draft protected the Murrough but I think these new amendments reverse that objective. 'We don't need more industrialisation of the greatest asset the town has when there are empty industrial units all over the county, including some very nearby' says Cllr. O'Reilly.

Eight meetings were held prior before Wednesday to allow the elected members to discuss the draft development plan. Cllr. O'Reilly says the 'importance of the Murrough' as an amenity for outdoor pursuits was discussed at each of these meetings, he was therefore surprised to see Cllr. Dunne's amendments handed around to each councillor just prior to Wednesday's vote on the draft.

'Either some of my fellow councillors are too short sighted to see the damage this could cause to the Murrough and the tourist benefits the area has for the town, or they are actively promoting the business interests of a handful of business people in the town.'

Cllr. Dunne maintains that his only intentions were to try and create jobs for the town.

'That part of the Murrough has been zoned for employment for some time now. If Cllr. O'Reilly had a problem he should have made it known at the meeting and made his own amendments. The draft plan has to go on public display so people have ten weeks if they want to make changes and lodge their own submissions.'

He adds, 'There has to be a balance in the Murrough, a balance between preserving the environment and creating jobs. I think my amendments add some balance to the draft. I want jobs for the people of Wicklow town, whether they are in the Murrough or somewhere else. I went through the right procedures with my amendments. That land has been historically zoned employment for some time, but

it's still well enough buffered to offer protection to the Murrough's environmental amenities and the area's rich bio-diversity.'

Cllr. O'Reilly, however, said the 'last minute amendment' could have 'devastating results for the Murrough.

'The mistakes of our predecessors have led to the destruction of one of County Wicklow's most beautiful, valuable and ecological sensitive assets, our coast line. We have the potential of hundreds of jobs in the area through tourism. The last thing we need is more industrialization of the area especially when we have half empty industrial estates within a couple of miles from the town.'