

Policy Context

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1.1.1 Introduction

The role of a high quality planning service is a vital and central function of a Local Authority. It acts both as a guide to the requirements and policies of the Planning Authority for those interested in pursuing development as well as informing the general public as to how these development proposals are likely to be assessed.

The structure of this service is guided by planning legislation and contains two primary components:

1. The development plan which sets general policies and development standards, and;
2. Development management which is the process whereby individual applications are assessed against the policies of the Development Plan.

The Development Plan plays a vital role in development promotion and regulation, and must therefore have a clear vision for the County, now and into the future. Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, each Planning Authority is obliged to make a Development Plan every six years. Development Plans comprise of a written statement and attendant maps that give a graphic representation of the objectives contained in the Plan. All Development Plans must have regard to national and regional policy.

Each Development Plan must include objectives for:

- Land use zoning of areas for residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, recreational, open space, community facilities or otherwise, or a mixture of those uses;
- Provision of infrastructure – transport including the promotion of public transport and road / rail development, energy, communications facilities, water supplies, waste recovery, disposal facilities, waste water services, etc.;
- Conservation and protection of the environment;
- Protection of structures and preservation of the character of Conservation Protection Areas;
- The integration of social, community and cultural requirements with the planning and sustainable development of the area;
- The preservation of the character of the landscape including preservation of views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest;
- The renewal and development of areas in need of regeneration;
- Provision of traveller accommodation;
- Preserving, improving and extending amenities and recreational amenities;
- Major Accidents Directive (siting of new establishments, modifications of existing establishments, development in the vicinity of establishments);
- Provision of community services, including schools, crèches, childcare facilities and other educational facilities, and;
- Protection of the linguistic and cultural heritage of Gaeltacht areas.

1.1.2 Period of the Plan

In accordance with the requirements of the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended, this County Development Plan will remain in effect for six years, to cover the period 2007 - 2013, from its adoption on March 2nd 2007 with a review of it commencing no later than four years after its adoption.

1.1.3 The Review Process

The review process of the 2001 Meath County Development Plan officially commenced with the publication of advertisements in the Irish Independent dated 4th March 2005 and the Meath Chronicle dated 5th March 2005. The review period stretched over a two year period and had to conclude with a fully adopted County Development Plan not later than 3rd March 2007.

1.1.3.1 Pre-draft Public Consultations

Prior to the preparation of the draft County Development Plan, and in accordance with Section 11 of the 2000 Act, as amended, the Planning Department prepared a detailed pre-draft consultation document 'Preparation of a new County Meath Development Plan - Strategic Issues Paper'. The purpose of the 'Strategic Issues Paper' was to engage in public consultation pursuant to the requirements of the Planning and Development Acts, 2000- 2004. The document also ensured that adequate information was available to interested persons, groups and organisations as the basis of instigating pre draft consultations.

The issues included in the Strategic Issues Paper related to settlement, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, retail, community, tourism, built and natural heritage, rural housing, social inclusion and cultural diversity, architecture and urban design, and Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The notice of intention of Meath County Council to review the existing County Development Plan was published in local and national newspapers. The advertisements notified the intention of Meath County Council to commence the preparation of the review of the existing County Development Plan. The pre-draft consultation phase commenced on the 9th March 2005 and concluded on the 6th May 2005. The advertisements also invited written submissions/observations from any interested parties or members of the public.

In addition, the consultation process comprised of the following:

- a) Letters to prescribed bodies and service providers;
- b) A notice was placed on the Meath County Council webpage, and;
- c) Notices were on display in County Hall, all of Meath County Council Area Offices, Town Council Offices, and all branch libraries in Co Meath.

Preliminary consultations also took place with the main service providers (i.e. providers of energy, telecommunications, transport, education, etc.) to discuss plans and policies, which are likely to have a significant bearing on Development Plan policy. Discussions also took place with the various County Council Departments, the Elected Members of Meath County Council and the Planning & Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee.

1.1.3.2 Response to Pre-draft Consultation Phase

352 submissions were received by Meath County Council with respect to the preparation of the new County Development Plan and all were considered in the Manager's Report prepared pursuant to Section 11 (4) of the Planning & Development Act 2000, presented to the Council on 25th July, 2005.

The accompanying table gives a breakdown on submissions received on an Electoral Area basis. 38% of all submissions received related to the Dunshaughlin Area with the other Electoral Areas each receiving approximately 15% of the submissions.

Breakdown of Total Submissions Received and Considered in this Report

Electoral Area	No. of submissions received
Dunshaughlin	134
Kells	65
Navan	36
Trim	63
Slane	41
General – County wide	3
Total	352

303 of the 352 submissions received consisted of proposals seeking the zoning or rezoning of lands for particular purposes, accounting for 86% of all submissions received. The magnitude and scale of submissions seeking the zoning of lands for residential, mixed residential and commercial uses and industrial / employment generating uses was somewhat alarming.

It was obvious from the analysis carried out as part of the Manager's Report on the Pre Draft Submissions to the Elected Members, that the areas under greatest influence from the Dublin Metropolitan Area – namely Drogheda Environs, Ashbourne, Ratoath, Dunboyne, Dunshaughlin, Clonee and Enfield, all on or adjacent to strategic transportation corridors, are the locations which are subject of the majority of the submissions in this regard. The scale and the geographical spread of the proposed zonings were key issues to be considered in the preparation of the Draft Development Plan.

The assessment of the individual land use zoning submissions in towns and villages was not subject to the County Development Plan review but the preparation of the individual Local Area Plans. The County Development Plan establishes the strategic context in which the various Local Area Plans will be prepared.

In order to give an accurate summary of the issues based submissions, the issues raised were put under a number of category headings. The main areas of concern include the proposed settlement strategy, land use zoning, employment and economic development, infrastructure, built & natural heritage, social inclusion, cultural diversity and community infrastructure. These issues and observations are summarised in full in the Manager's Report, and were taken into consideration in the preparation of the Plan.

1.1.3.3 Preparing the Draft County Development Plan

The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, requires that the Draft Development Plan is put on display for not less than 10 weeks, and that a notice and copy of the Draft is sent to the Minister, and all Prescribed Bodies, Town Councils in the area, County Development Boards in the area, adjoining Local Authorities and that a notice is placed in a newspaper circulating in the area.

The Draft Development Plan was on public display from Friday 30th June to Friday 8th September.

The consultation process comprised of four elements:

1. **Display**

The Draft County Plan was on public display for the full ten weeks in County Hall, Navan and in all Meath County Council Area Offices. Copies of the Draft Plan were placed in all public library buildings in the County. For the full length of the display period, planning staff were available during office hours to discuss the Draft Plan at County Hall, Navan and to advise on how to make a submission.

2. **Press and Live Media**

On the 29th of June 2006, the required statutory notice advertisement was placed in the Irish Independent newspaper announcing the commencement of the public display and public consultation period on the Draft Meath County Development Plan. The advertisement was also placed in the Meath Chronicle, date of publication 30th of June, 2006

The Local Authority also placed a series of advertisements with the local radio station LFMFM notifying the general public that a Draft Development Plan had been prepared, placed on public display and that the Local Authority were seeking submissions and observations in respect of same.

3. **Direct Marketing**

The Council wrote to all of the Prescribed Bodies informing them that the Draft Plan was now on display and of the dates within which submissions would be considered. A copy of the Draft Plan on CD was sent to all prescribed bodies, and in printed form to those who requested same.

The Council engaged the services of a Marketing and Public Relations Company who prepared a leaflet entitled "Your chance to put ME into Meath". The leaflet summarised the key issues and policies contained in the Draft Plan into a fold-over A4 leaflet. This was distributed to over 600 groups as contained on the Community & Enterprise Department's data base of community groups. This document was placed in all County Libraries and Council Offices, where the Draft Plan was on display.

4. **Website**

The Draft Plan, both maps and text, were placed on the website on Monday 10th of July 2006. This availability of both maps and text proved very popular in that many queries on the Draft Plan received by the Council came through as phone calls from persons who had viewed the Draft Plan on the web.

543 written submissions were received during this consultation period. The Council wishes to express its appreciation to those who made submissions. This was a significant increase in the number of submissions received at the pre-draft stage of public consultation on the Draft where 352 written submissions were received. It is possible to breakdown the 543 written submissions as follows:

Main Issues	No. of Subs Received
Record of Protected Structures	153
Cushinstown / Primatestown / Kilmoon Cross	114
Land Use Zoning in Towns / Villages	90
Dromone	41
General Draft Development Plan	145
Total	543

The Planning Authority welcomed the number of submissions and observations received which highlights the significant level of public interest in the plan-making process.

1.1.3.4 Approach to Consideration of Written Submissions

Following the initial recording of all submissions, each submission was read first to allocate the issues it raised to the appropriate chapters / appendices of the Development Plan. Following the (often multiple) categorisation of all submissions, each submission was again read as the issues for each chapter was individually assessed, summarised and proposed changes recommended. A major report on the Draft Development Plan was prepared, called the Section 12 (4) Manager's Report on the Draft Development Plan Submissions. This report was considered over a total of 7 meetings from December 4th 2006, when the Report was presented to the Elected Members to the decision to place the proposed amendments on public display on January 26th, 2007.

Some submissions received included issues not relevant to the Development Plan, and in some cases not relevant to planning generally or local authority operations and such points cannot be included in the Managers Report.

The submissions could be roughly broken down into 2 main categories - 390 related to the Draft County Development Plan including the Environmental Report & Landscape Character Assessment and the remaining 153 related to the Draft Record of Protected Structures.

The Manager's Report proposed a significant number of amendments to the Draft Development Plan, the most significant of which related to the Settlement Strategy. A revised Chapter 2 Settlement Strategy was placed on public display as an amendment to ensure that the new County Development Plan adhered to the policy framework provided by the National Spatial Strategy and the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area.

1.1.3.5 Amendments to the Draft County Development Plan

The Proposed Amendments to the Draft Development Plan were placed on public display from Monday 29th January, 2007 to Monday 26th February, 2007. 80 written submissions were received during this consultation period. Following the initial recording of all submissions, each submission was read first to allocate the issues it raised to the appropriate Proposed Amendment referred to. Following the categorisation of all submissions, each submission was again read as the issues for each chapter were individually assessed, summarised and proposed changes recommended.

The majority of the submissions received were in respect of the revised Settlement Strategy and in particular in relation to the proposed residential land use zoning objectives and demand management techniques. The Manager's Report proposed a number of modifications to the

proposed amendments, in particular an increase in the proposed population and household projections contained in the Draft Development Plan, as amended. These modifications were required having regard to development activity that had taken place since the Draft Plan was prepared.

Following consideration and detailed debate, the Elected Members at a Special Meeting adopted the Development Plan on March 2nd, 2007, inclusive of the proposed amendments and modifications to the amendments albeit with a small number of further modifications.

1.1.4 Format of the new County Meath Development Plan

The new County Development Plan consists of 2 Volumes, Volume One (Objectives for the County at Large) and Volume Two (Detailed Written Statements and Development Objectives) for thirty settlements in the County.

Volume I consists of 10 individual chapters and a series of appendices. Chapters 2 – 8 contains the seven strategies which collectively form the Development Strategy which is being pursued in this Development Plan. Each of these chapters deal with individual land use planning topics and includes a written statement in which strategic themes and clear policy objectives for each planning topic are provided, and a series of maps supporting the text. Chapter 9 focuses on the Implementation and Monitoring of the County Development Plan and Chapter 10 provides detailed Development Management Guidelines & Standards. The latter guidelines and standards give general guidance to applicants on the criteria which will be used by the Planning Authority to assess planning applications and give guidance on the criteria that will be applied in assessing particular development types. These are supplemented throughout the Plan by Development Assessment Criteria which follow certain policy objectives.

Included as separate appendices to Volume I are the new Record of Protected Structures and the Landscape Character Assessment of the County accompanied by their respective book of maps.

Volume II of the 2001 County Development Plan has in effect being re-adopted for a further two years pending the preparation and adoption of individual or grouped Local Area Plans. It is an objective of the new County Development Plan that all Local Area Plans will be prepared and adopted within the immediate two years following the adoption of the county plan. In respect of the East Meath Local Area Plans –North and South and the Kilcock Local Area Plan, and in accordance with Section 18 (4) (B) of the Planning & Development Acts 2000-2006, it is proposed that these would remain in effect as adopted, unless otherwise amended in accordance with Section 18 (5), or other.

1.1.5 The International and National Context

Physical planning in Ireland generally and Meath specifically is increasingly influenced by significant international and national reports and perspectives. At the international level, the consensus on the need to promote sustainable development is amongst the most profound influences. The term “sustainable development” refers to the meeting of the societal needs of the present generation without reducing the capacity of the environment to sustain the needs of future generations. In line with Government policy and the adopted position of Meath County Council, this principle will be a major component of the County Development Plan and its aims.

The European Union will also continue to exert a major influence on the county through publications such as Agenda 2000, Local Agenda 21, the European Spatial Development Perspective, numerous

and various EU Directives, etc.. These reports coupled to EU financial support for infrastructure improvements to transport, sanitary services and socio-economic development illustrate the depth of influence the EU will have over the Plan.

At the national level, recent reports such as the National Development Plan and Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland have been significant influences upon the preparation of this plan. Specific Planning Guidelines in relation to Retailing, Telecommunications, Renewable Energy, Built Heritage, Childcare, Sustainable Rural Housing, Quarries, etc., have also been addressed through the development of specific policy responses detailed in the individual specific chapters and sections.

1.1.6 The Regional Context

In terms of regional context, the single greatest influence is Meath's location within the Greater Dublin Area and Mid-East Region.

In 1999, the Strategic Planning Guidelines (SPGs) were prepared for the Greater Dublin Area and Mid-East Region, providing a framework and guidance as to the direction and role of the seven authorities in this region. The 2001 County Development Plan had regard to these guidelines, as they pertained to Meath. However, when the SPGs were reviewed in 2003, and the Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) for the GDA were adopted in 2004, it was found that the level of balanced growth sought and envisaged had not occurred.

The principal trends that were exhibited in this region related to the rate and scale of residential growth and the increased strength in the economy.

The net result of this economic growth context is that Meath is located in the fastest growing region of the country and accordingly it is reasonable to assume that the development plan must take account of a population dynamic driven by economic growth and possible net migration. This materialised over the life of the plan, and is the single biggest challenge facing the county presenting both opportunities and threats to the county's ability to become sustainable.

Broadly Meath's key trends are identified as:

- Unforeseen and intense increase in residential population, in particular in the population available to work;
- Influx of immigrants from Dublin comprising young working professionals;
- Residential development locating along commuter belts;
- Increasing employment/participation levels;
- Altering the dominant type of work, being more public administration / office / commercial based as opposed to involvement in local industry or agriculture;
- Local job creation unable to meet or keep pace with residential growth; and
- Significant and unsustainable commuting population.

Increasing the level of local job creation and improving Meath's jobs to labour force ratio are of paramount importance if Meath is to become more sustainable. The RPGs have set Meath a target of increasing this ratio from its current (2002) levels of 0.49 to 0.57 by 2011.

The RPGs have also introduced the concept of "Dynamic Clusters". It is proposed that these clusters would be developed in a mutually dependent way so that the amenities and economies of the whole are greater than the sum of the individual parts.

The RPGs designated a number of clusters for Meath, as follows: Primary Dynamic Cluster: Navan, Trim and Kells and Dunboyne and Ashbourne, as a Secondary Dynamic Cluster.

1.1.7 Implications of the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area

These Guidelines, published in July 2004, have profound implications for the types of policies to be framed in this Development Plan and the long-term future of the county.

In summary, the main implications for the county are listed as follows:

- That the town of Navan has considerable potential in a regional context to become a self sustaining town in the Hinterland Area of the Greater Dublin Area, identified as a Large Growth Town I (i.e. Primary Growth Town), and connected to other urban areas by high quality road and possibly rail linkages;
- That the settlement hierarchy identified for the region be respected in the County Development Plan and subsequent and associated Local Area Plans, providing for population and significant economic expansion in the County's large and moderate growth towns and within its metropolitan area, with a corresponding slow-down in the smaller centres;
- Promote and provide for sustainable linkages between the County's urban centres and the metropolitan area, in particular the rail line to Dunboyne (phase 1) and on to Navan (phase 2);
- That continued and unchecked increases in the county's commuting population are unsustainable and the requirement to slow down population growth, in the hinterland areas is critical;
- That every effort be made to adopt a positive and proactive approach to economic and employment generating development, in particular focusing on the county's dynamic clusters;
- That the landscape, environmental and cultural heritage qualities of the Meath countryside have a significant amenity role to play in the future of the Greater Dublin Area which should be protected by employing new planning tools such as Landscape Character Assessments, Landscape Conservation Area designations;
- That other strategic resources such as agricultural land and building materials raw materials need to be protected for strategic regional and national roles;
- To work with adjoining authorities, such as Kildare and Fingal County Councils and Drogheda Borough Council to facilitate the sustainable development of Large Growth Towns and Metropolitan Area urban centres predominately located within the areas of our neighbouring authority but influenced and assisted by development in Meath, and;
- To seek the same level of support and co-operation from our neighbouring authorities when devising and implementing our policies in large urban centres which adjoin / straddle administrative borders.

This Development Plan has been prepared as an implementation mechanism for the strategy as it would apply to County Meath and a wide range of policies have been developed to respond to the issues raised.

1.1.8 Compliance with the RPGs

To adhere to the National and Regional Strategic Planning Guidance, the new County Development Plan must :

- Set a strategic population and housing unit horizon for the plan period 2007 – 2013 and beyond that is consistent with the NSS and RPGs;
- Demonstrate how the overall outlook of the Planning Authority in relation to its settlement and transportation strategy has been derived from the NSS and RPGs for the GDA;
- Include a short statement outlining high level aims for Navan (and Drogheda) as primary development centres and for Ashbourne, Dunboyne / Clonee / Pace Corridor, Kells and Trim as recognised moderate growth towns as well as aims for the other towns and villages and rural areas to support the NSS and RPGs for the GDA, and;
- Illustrate the overall strategic approach with maps and diagrams, for example by reproducing the key strategic maps from the RPGs for the GDA.

In setting out detailed objectives, Meath County Council has strived for maximum consistency between the objectives and policies of the RPGs and those of the new County Development Plan. Meath County Council must demonstrate how it takes into account the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area in this process. Key issues that arise therefore, as expressed in the current County Development Plan, will relate to:

- The allocation of the majority share of the forecast population growth for the county primarily to Navan, Drogheda Environs and to the Dunboyne – Clonee- Pace Corridor. The Moderate Growth Towns of Ashbourne, Trim, Kells and Kilcock Environs also have a role in the accommodating a share of regionally derived residential growth in County Meath;
- Restraint in relation to the further expansion of the south east Meath towns of Ratoath, Summerhill, Longwood and Enfield and the coastal strip of the County, which are primarily expanding in a dormitory nature;
- Protection of the countryside, and;
- Framing an appropriate infrastructural needs with a particular emphasis on public transport.

To give effect to the NSS and the RPGs, the new County Development Plan must strive towards achieving the following objectives and policies regarding the Hinterland Area, which covers the majority of the County and the Metropolitan Area that includes the Dunboyne / Clonee / Pace Corridor and the Environs of Kilcock and Maynooth and selected large and moderate growth centres. It is likely that the following policies and objectives will be paramount to the strategy proposed in the new County Development Plan;

- Development and growth of each of the selected urban centres should be generally restricted to the maximum extent possible, so that they function as the focal points for the development of their rural catchments;
- Development of small growth towns and villages should be carried out in a more sustainable manner, to ensure that a higher proportion of residents of the towns and villages are employed locally, and;
- Clear definition of the boundaries of urban centres should be given to ensure a visible division between rural and urban areas.

It is an objective of the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area to facilitate the Government objective of assisting the provision of an affordable housing scheme through the use of lands attached to the former airfield at Gormonston. The Council will endeavour to facilitate this Government objective. Any development at this location is predicated upon resolving issues pertaining to provision of affordable housing and existing deficits in water services infrastructure.

To this end, Meath County Council will pursue investigations into the provision of a sub regional wastewater treatment facility and outfall to the Irish Sea in the vicinity of Gormonston. The provision of this sub regional facility would reduce Meath County Council's dependence on adjoining Authorities for the provision of essential physical infrastructure. In respect of the urban centres along the East coast, these would be diverted to a sub regional facility at Gormonston, providing an alternative solution thus releasing adequate capacity for Drogheda. The provision of this sub regional plant would facilitate each of the centres to develop in line with the objectives of the RPGs, the Greater Drogheda Planning Strategy and the County Development Plan.

In the event, of the former airfield being developed to facilitate the realisation of this objective, the requirement to prepare a subsequent LAP for these and surrounding lands may materialise.

In all instances, Meath County Council will seek the promotion of high-quality urban design that balances the achievement of densities with the provision of high quality services, the management of public safety and the provision of high quality access and permeable networks.

Development in all instances should be sustainable. Regard should be had to the availability of public transport infrastructure, to the socio-economic profile, to the creation of appropriate and sustainable levels of employment and commercial activities commensurate with residential development within each centre and the protection of the rural hinterland and greenbelt areas.

1.1.9 Strategic Planning Approach

The challenges facing County Meath cannot be underestimated. We find ourselves in a position of unprecedented growth within the residential sector, unparalleled by any other county, even those within the Greater Dublin Area or Mid-east region. However, our employment sector and economic development generally has remained low and has been unable to keep pace with the increases in residential population. We have provided homes for the people of the county, and for many who have migrated here, but have been unable to provide the corresponding level of jobs, amenities, services and physical infrastructure necessary to sustain such a population.

To address these challenges, the Vision Statement for the sustainable planning and development of the county which will form the basis of the Development Plan is:

To plan for and support the sustainable development of Co. Meath as an excellent place to invest in, to visit and to live in, renowned for the quality of its natural and built environment, culture and the strength and viability of its communities.

Having set out the overall 'vision statement', the next step is to derive the detailed policies and objectives for achieving the overall 'vision statement' of the Plan. This has been done under the guidance of a set of Strategic Themes, which are an essential part of the thinking behind this plan.

The Strategic Themes are set out below and are presented under the headings of the main chapters of the plan.

1.1.9.1 Settlement Strategy

- The development of a clear structure based on size and function has been clearly set out for the entire county and the functional relationship between them will be developed over the life of this Plan and beyond.
- The Settlement Strategy aims to locate population growth and channel development in line with the principles of the NSS and RPGs. This includes:
 - The promotion and channelling of development in the first instance to Navan, Drogheda Environs and the Dunboyne / Clonee / Pace Rail Corridor which are the three major designated areas of growth in the county. These centres are identified to accept the majority of the County's share of regional growth going forward and will continue to accommodate a significant level of immigrants, primarily from the Dublin region;
 - The continued development of Ashbourne on a sustainable basis will also be pursued along with the development of the environs of both Kilcock and Maynooth which are located in a Primary Dynamic Cluster in the Metropolitan Area of the GDA. The continued development of Kells and Trim will be balanced with the protection of the inherent qualities of these Heritage Towns which may limit the quantum and scale of development which these centres can assimilate;
 - The Development Plan has identified Dunshaughlin as a Moderate Growth Town in the Settlement Strategy and pending the recognition of this designation in the review of the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area, the Planning Authority will revisit the quantum and scale of additional residential households allocated to Dunshaughlin;
 - The development of Small Growth Towns, Key Villages and Villages will be more closely linked to locally derived growth rather than to regionally derived residential growth;
 - The introduction of demand management techniques to existing residentially zoned lands to ensure compliance between the household and population projections for the County and the scale and quantum of residential growth in each of the County's settlements, and;
 - To ensure that over time the development of our county's towns and villages become more self sustaining in terms of more people being employed locally.

1.1.9.2 Economic Development Strategy

- To build on and enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of County Meath in order to make it one of the Country's prime locations for indigenous and foreign economic and employment generating investment;
- To facilitate the provision of adequate land for employment uses, including sites at suitable locations for industrial, enterprise, office, retail and other small business uses having regard to spatial planning, infrastructural, environmental and transportation requirements and compatibility with adjoining uses;
- To secure the county's role as a location for economic growth in the Greater Dublin Area and to ensure that the employment benefits are better balanced across the whole county;

- To facilitate and encourage the development of designated dynamic clusters, such as would allow the creation of a critical mass, in terms of residential population and economic activities, sufficient to sustain the proposed expanded economic sector of such centres;
- To encourage all forms of economic and employment development throughout the county, in particular within the identified dynamic clusters, at a scale and nature appropriate to the chosen location and subject to normal planning considerations, and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area;
- To proactively promote County Meath as an investment showcase and encourage appropriate economic and development opportunities within the parameters of the County Meath Development Plan;
- To prepare a Thematic Spatial Strategy for industrial development and enterprise which would identify and support the development of areas where significant clusters of power, roads, water and gas could be harnessed to become nationally important areas to accommodate very large scale value added employment while avoiding potential for future environmental and planning conflicts;
- To maximise the potential and opportunities of the retail sector, while protecting the environment of existing and established town centres and the retailing hierarchy in the county, and;
- To promote, encourage and facilitate the development of the tourism industry through sustainable means, including the conservation, protection and enhancement of the built and natural heritage, the protection of sensitive landscapes, cultural and community environments in order to maximise upon the economic benefits arising from the industry.

1.1.9.3 Infrastructure Strategy

- To promote and facilitate the provision of the necessary infrastructure to fully accommodate the demand for development and future population increases in an environmentally sustainable manner;
- Resolution of infrastructural deficits, where possible, focusing on the achievement of the Settlement Hierarchy and the Economic Development Strategy;
- Promote land use planning measures which facilitate transportation efficiency, economic returns on transport investment, minimisation of environmental impacts and a general shift towards the use of public transportation throughout the County. This will also be achieved by locating quality employment and residential development in proximity to each other, reducing the need to travel & the dependence on the private car and by further developing and enhancing the availability and attractiveness of public transport;

- To promote higher residential densities within identified growth centres as facilitated by the DoEHLG Residential Density Guidelines for Planning Authorities, so as to support viable public transport services;
- Advance the water supply and wastewater collection and treatment infrastructural projects as contained in the Assessment of Water Services Needs in order to accommodate the planned levels of growth for the County and to ensure that the necessary projects are included in future Water Services Investment Programme;
- To secure the provision of water, wastewater treatment and waste management initiatives to accommodate the future sustainable economic and residential growth of the County, where necessary, in conjunction with the DoEHLG and adjoining Local Authorities;
- To reduce Meath County Council's dependence on the waste water & water treatment infrastructure of adjoining Local Authorities to cater for the projected development needs of Drogheda, East Meath and the Dunshaughlin Electoral Area urban centres;
- To prepare a Thematic Spatial Strategy for Infrastructure which will identify and protect corridors for major critical infrastructure in the County such as power, rail, road, water and waste, and;
- To facilitate energy infrastructure provision, including the development of renewable energy sources at suitable locations, so as to provide for the further physical and economic development of Meath.

1.1.9.4 Housing Strategy

- Facilitate the provision of adequate zoned land in accordance with the Settlement Strategy of the Plan to accommodate the growing population and changing household needs including social and affordable housing;
- Promote housing policies that are socially inclusive and which take particular account of the needs of older people and people with disabilities;
- Promote high quality living environments for enhancing the quality of life being enjoyed by the resident population;
- Promote the provision of services and facilities that are compatible with housing development and that are required for sustainable and balanced communities;
- Actively encourage participation in the housing sector through partnership arrangements and the provision of infrastructure and serviced land for social, voluntary and private housing, where possible.
- The main conclusions from the Housing Strategy are;
 - The population projection contained in the Development Plan is 210,000 persons by 2013;
 - 29,508 additional housing units will be constructed in the Meath area from January 1st 2007 to December 31st 2013;

- The capacity of serviced (or planned to be serviced) and zoned land for housing is more than adequate to satisfy the overall housing requirement over this period. However, additional lands may be required to be identified in Drogheda Environs, Dunboyne / Clonee / Pace Corridor, Ashbourne, Enfield and possibly Ballivor to provide the adequate headroom of 50%;
- 27.8% of all persons who will seek to buy property in the County over the life of the County Development Plan will experience affordability difficulties. The maximum requirement of 20% of housing units should be provided to meet social and affordable needs;
- Greatest demand for social housing is in Navan, Trim, Kells, Ashbourne, Athboy, Bettystown, Dunboyne, Laytown, Oldcastle and Dunshaughlin. The Housing Strategy restricts options to comply with Part V obligations in these centres;
- A requirement that 20% of units in new eligible residential developments be social / affordable units with a sliding scale in operation between 3% social / 17% affordable and 10% social / 10% affordable having regard to existing concentrations of social housing and the known / potential demand for social and affordable housing in different urban centres, and;
- This would provide potentially provide an additional 1,100 social housing units to the Local Authority and 4,000 affordable housing units throughout the County.

1.1.9.5 Rural Development

- To encourage the continued sustainable development of rural communities without compromising the physical, environmental, natural and heritage resources of the County;
- To support and promote the sustainable social and economic development of rural areas with a particular focus upon those areas particularly disadvantaged;
- To reinforce the vitality and future of smaller rural towns, villages and graigs as nodes for rural development and ensuring a functional relationship between housing and the rural area in which it is located;
- To maintain a vibrant and healthy agricultural sector based on the principles of sustainable development whilst at the same time finding alternative employment in or close to rural areas to sustain rural communities;
- To develop forestry to a scale and in a manner which maximises its contribution to the economic and social well being of the County on a sustainable basis and which is compatible with the protection of the environment;
- To ensure adequate supplies of aggregate resources to meet the future growth needs of the County;
- To ensure that rural generated rural housing needs be accommodated in the areas they arise, subject to satisfying good practice in relation to site location, access, drainage and design requirements and that urban generated rural housing needs should take place within built-up areas or land identified through the development plan process;

- To ensure that individual house developments in rural areas satisfy the housing requirements of persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community in which they are proposed, subject to compliance with normal planning criteria. An assessment of individual rural development proposals including one-off houses shall have regard to other policies and objectives in this Development Plan, and in particular Section 8.3.3 Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site, and;
- To ensure the continued survival and development of the Gaeltachtaí as an area distinct in the linguistic and cultural life of the county.

1.1.9.6 Social Strategy

- To provide for the future well being of the residents of the county by ensuring the provision of necessary services and facilities;
- Meath County Council is committed to developing a society based on equality, inclusion and participation for all, with each individual having a right to live their life in a pleasant, safe environment with access to necessary services and facilities to fulfil their aspirations and potentials;
- Strengthen the fabric of towns and villages through the promotion of adequate provision of integrated community services and facilities of high standard, age, appropriateness and accessible to all age groups and sectors of society in the most appropriate locations in partnership with all relevant bodies and groups;
- To support the provision and even distribution of a range of social infrastructure facilities to meet the needs of the County's population in liaison with other statutory, voluntary and community groups;
- To ensure that, where practicable, community, recreational and open space facilities are clustered, with the community facilities being located in local centres or combined with school facilities, as appropriate. Community facilities should be located close to or within walking distance of housing, accessible to all sectors of the community and facilitate multi-use functions through their design and layout, and;
- To require as part of all new residential and commercial developments, and in existing developments, where appropriate, provision to be made for facilities including local/ neighbourhood shops, childcare facilities, schools and recreational facilities, and to seek their provision concurrent with development.

1.1.9.7 Cultural, Heritage & Landscape Protection Strategy

- Encourage the continued sustainable development of rural communities without compromising the physical, environmental, natural and heritage resources of the County;
- Protect, conserve and enhance the County's bio-diversity and natural heritage; which includes wildlife (flora & fauna), habitats, landscapes and/or landscape features of importance to wildlife;

- Protect, conserve and enhance buildings, areas, structures, sites and features of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest;
- Ensure that features of Meath's natural heritage are protected, that bio-diversity is conserved and where possible enhanced, that watercourses are safeguarded from pollution, that landscapes are maintained and enriched, and that tourism and recreational uses are facilitated in a sensitive manner;
- Promote the understanding of Co Meath's landscape in terms of its inherent and unique character and to recognise what elements should be preserved, conserved or enhanced, and;
- Promote a unified approach to landscape planning and management, linking policies and objectives for the preservation of the county's unique landscape character to all relevant planning policies and objectives throughout the Plan.

1.1.10 Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before the decision is made to adopt the plan or programme. The purpose "is provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development."

The Development Plan, and any amendments to same, will be the subject of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), in accordance with the DoEHLG SEA Guidelines. The Environmental Report has proofed the strategic policies and objectives against 'strategic environmental objectives', setting out the potential environmental impacts of the policies or objectives of the Plan were they to be implemented

The Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Development Plan was only carried out in respect of decisions yet to be taken. As the Plan is required to adhere to national and regional plans or programmes, decisions taken at this higher level and then incorporated into the county plan are not the subject of SEA (as per Section 3.14, DoEHLG SEA Guidelines).

An Environmental Statement has been prepared to accompany the Development Plan.

