

Rural Development

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6.1 RURAL DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Against the background of:

- a) Unprecedented levels of population growth in the County over the past decade, and associated changes in the housing market relating to supply and demand, affordability and lifestyle choice;
- b) The changing nature of the agricultural sector, whether by reason of the effect of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms on agriculture, the proximity of rural parts of the county to the largest metropolitan area in the state, and;
- c) The proximity of the County's rural hinterland to Dublin, with associated conflicts between dense urban populations unfamiliar with rural activities and active agricultural lands, which are becoming difficult to farm and more valuable as a residential land bank.



Meath County Council must, through the role of the development plan, endeavour to resolve these competing demands and manage the changing character of the County for the betterment of the County and its people.

In this regard, and prior to drafting the development plan, an assessment of the county's socio-economic profile and planning and development trends was carried out, such as would allow the Planning Authority to formulate the present position of the County and assist in creating the vision for rural areas in the County into the future.

This analysis has shown that despite the positive impacts of the "Celtic Tiger" and the associated boom in terms of employment and wealth, these positive benefits have not been enjoyed throughout the County. It is the intention of the Planning Authority to put in place a series of policies and objectives which would realise the goal of encouraging and facilitating a balancing out of this wealth and employment, particularly in the more marginal areas.

When considering rural areas throughout the county, it is necessary not only to consider the numbers residing in these areas, but also their socio-economic profile, in terms of their age, education level, economic prosperity, form of employment, etc. To this end, the Planning Authority has made use of the "Socio Economic Profile" prepared by the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA), NUI Maynooth on behalf of the Meath County Development Board.

In broad terms, the NIRSA Socio Economic Profile found significant variations in the distribution of different age cohorts throughout the county. The youth dependency ratio has high ratios (i.e. there is a relatively younger population) along a corridor from Dunboyne to Kells and along the coast, south of Drogheda, and around Trim, Athboy, Enfield and Clonard. This corresponds with the areas under most pressure from commuting. The elderly dependency ratio is much less complex with a strong gradient from the southeast to the northwest, i.e. there is a relatively higher level of elderly people along this corridor. This would tend to demonstrate that young people, especially with higher educational qualifications, are leaving the county's rural areas to take up opportunities in urban areas. The remaining population is becoming disproportionately elderly and increasingly economically inactive.

Thus in preparing this plan, it is important to create conditions that will attract young people to the rural areas of the County by encouraging new development, which meets the needs of modern living, while also respecting the existing settlement pattern so that existing businesses and services will remain viable and, in future, conditions may allow additional facilities, infrastructure and services to be provided.

6.2 CORE RURAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

There is a clear role for the development plan in resolving the competing demands on the Meath countryside. Maintaining the intrinsic qualities of the rural areas and developing them appropriately is consistent with a planned approach to sustainable development. Underpinning the effective management of the countryside must be a number of basic development objectives which seek to realise an overall goal, as outlined below.

Goal

To encourage the continued sustainable development of rural communities without compromising the physical, environmental, natural and heritage resources of the County.

To realise this goal, the Planning Authority has identified a series of key strategic objectives relating to the county and rural development generally, and has devised more detailed objectives specific to development types and rural area types, as the strategy elaborates on these issues.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

RUR DEV SO 1	To support and promote the sustainable social and economic development of rural areas with a particular focus upon those areas particularly disadvantaged.
RUR DEV SO 2	To identify and protect rural resources, such as areas with wind energy potential, locally and regionally important aquifers or water sources and known or potential aggregate sources, from development which would prejudice their sustainable usage.
RUR DEV SO 3	To recognise the strategic roles the county will play in the regional and national context in terms of recreation, heritage conservation, natural resources and food production, and ensuring compatibility between this plan and regional or national strategies.
RUR DEV SO 4	To reinforce the vitality and future of smaller rural towns, villages and gauges as nodes for rural development and ensuring a functional relationship between housing and the rural area in which it is located.
RUR DEV SO 5	To protect and enhance the visual qualities of rural areas through the sensitive design of necessary development.

6.2.1 Agriculture

County Meath is renowned for its rich pasturelands that has supported a wide variety of farming types. Agriculture has traditionally been the most important contributor to the rural economy of Co. Meath. While it is now providing less employment, it still remains important as a significant source of income and employment in rural areas. The average farm size, measured in both hectares and output levels remains well above the national average throughout most of county, with smaller farm holdings concentrated in the north, north west and parts of the south west of the County. The highest levels of farm output are associated with the dairying and tillage farms in the east of the county. These statistics mask a reduction in the actual number of farms in the County with the resultant enlargement of the remaining farms primarily in the south east of the County and along the Boyne Valley.

The direction of agricultural policy as provided by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has moved away from direct price supports and has been replaced by a system of direct payments to farmers. It is anticipated that this will exacerbate the increase in the level of part time farming especially among those rearing beef cattle. Greater emphasis is also being placed upon more environmentally sustainable agriculture and it is also envisaged that more farmers will participate in the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS).

In 2002, there were only 3,835 persons at work in the agriculture, forestry and fishery sector, representing 6.5% of the county's workforce. The number of persons employed in this sector fell in Meath by 35.4% between 1996 – 2002 compared to the decline of 30.4% throughout the state. Notwithstanding this, the percentage of those involved in agricultural employment in the county is marginally higher than the state average of 5.9%, and is still an important and beneficial economic sector in the county.

Employment in agriculture is mainly focused on the more northern and western parts of the county with the lowest levels found in the commuter areas in the east of the county. In the northwest and southwest of the County, agriculture accounted for more than 20% of total employment. However, while there is a general predominance of farmers whose sole occupation is farming throughout much of the northwest and in many of the less accessible districts in other parts of the county, the numbers involved in part-time farming is increasing. Even in the north and northwest of the county, part time farming is significant in that many of the farmers may also be employed in local manufacturing industries, including some in neighbouring counties. Farming has become a subsidiary occupation on more than 40% of all farms, and this is predominant around the main urban centres in the centre and south east of the county.

Specialist beef production is the most common type of farming accounting for almost half of the total farms in 2002, although they are more strongly represented in the north west and the south east around Dunboyne. Intensive dairying is the second most common type of farming, though the number of farms in this sector is declining significantly. Intensive dairying is associated with the best pastures especially to the east, north and south of Navan and also around Athboy. Similarly, intensive tillage farming which is very specialised is also mostly concentrated on larger farms mainly in the centre and east of the county. Specialist sheep rearing is more restricted, both in terms of the number of farms but also in its geographical distribution. Its relative importance is greatest in the south and the northeast of the county.

Meath is the country's second most important centre for the bloodstock industry, after County Kildare. A number of internationally known stud farms are located in the County. There is also potential to develop the non-thoroughbred sector in the County.

Agriculture will continue to be an important component of the economy. However, no one economic sector offers all of the solutions to the challenges facing rural areas. The response lies in different packages of measures to tap the potential that individual rural areas possess. Advancing technology and farm consolidation will result in increased output but will also continue to reduce agriculturally based employment. The agricultural sector must adapt to the challenges posed by modernisation, restructuring, market development and the increasing importance of environmental issues. An economically efficient agricultural and food sector, together with forestry, exploitation of natural resources and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, are essential components of the development of the rural economy.

GOAL

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.

POLICIES

RD POL 1	To encourage and facilitate agricultural diversification into agri-businesses such as organic foods, rural tourism and small to medium sized enterprises subject to the retention of the holding for primarily agricultural use and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
RD POL 2	To protect the economic and social benefits of local county markets devoted to the sale of local agricultural and craft produce and to support their role as visitor attractions.
RD POL 3	To facilitate the development of agriculture while ensuring that natural waters, wildlife habitats and conservation areas are protected from pollution.
RD POL 4	To protect agricultural or agri-business uses from unplanned and / or incompatible urban development.

OBJECTIVES

RD OBJ 1

To prepare a Thematic Spatial Strategy for rural development and agricultural restructuring. This strategy will examine the likely effects of the Common Agricultural Policy reform on marginal agricultural areas which are likely to experience increasing levels of afforestation, alternative enterprises and rural settlement as a result. The Strategy will attempt to plan such changes in an integrated and co-ordinated manner which will prove beneficial for all in addition to providing increased protection for environmental assets such as groundwater and surface water quality, landscape and cultural heritage.

6.3 AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

6.3.1 Agricultural Buildings

The provision of well located structures and facilities necessary for good and environmentally sound agricultural practice shall be supported by the Planning Authority. The suitability of a given proposal will be determined by the following factors:

- The provision of buildings to a design, materials specification and appearance and at locations which would be compatible with the protection of rural amenities. Particular sensitivity should be paid to developments therefore in sensitive landscapes as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment (Refer to Appendix VI);
- The comprehensiveness of information in relation to waste management with particular emphasis on developments within existing farm complexes having regard to the potential cumulative effects;
- The availability of an effective means of farm waste management to ensure nutrient balancing between application of farm wastes to land and the balanced uptake by agricultural use of land;
- The availability of measures to ensure good supervision in relation to the management of farm wastes including ownership of spreadlands or control of same through agreements capable of effective enforcement, and;
- Whilst the Planning Authority recognises the primacy in use terms of agriculture in rural areas and that the presence of individual housing should not impinge unduly on legitimate and necessary rural activity, regard should be had to the unnecessary proximity of major new farm complexes to existing residential development.

6.3.2 Intensive Agriculture

The requirements of the preceding section will be applied to intensive agri-business proposals in the pig and poultry sectors.

Whilst the Planning Authority recognises the role of this sector to contribute towards national economic targets and the economic well being of the county in general, it is vital that the environmental qualities of the county are recognised in such proposals and protected accordingly. This on occasion will require such proposals to be considered in the context of the intensity of such activities within a limited region and the appropriateness of this in relation to the density of waste disposal and the effect of this on the region. This applies in particular where the management of nutrients would be located in areas identified as major aquifers and which would be vulnerable to contamination of ground water.

It is recognised however that in certain cases, these activities will be subject to Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Licensing (IPPC) pursuant to Part IV of the Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1992, as substituted by section 15 of the Protection of the Environment Act 2003. Under Section 99F of the EPA Act, 1992, where a Planning Authority decides to grant permission to a development which is also subject to IPPC licensing, the Planning Authority is precluded from attaching conditions for the purposes of controlling emissions from the activity. This does not preclude the Planning Authority to refuse permission for a development on environmental grounds, having regard to the proper planning and sustainable development of an area, notwithstanding whether an IPPC licence has been granted or is required.

6.3.3 Alternative Agri-Enterprise

The Planning Authority shall support proposals for agri-tourism developments such as farmhouse guest accommodation, equestrian centres, outdoor pursuit centres and other similar activities including small-scale craft activities where normal development criteria in relation to satisfactory access, appropriate location and design and waste management are observed.

Whilst the Planning Authority would encourage and endeavour to facilitate the expansion and diversification of agriculture, some agri-business activities may be more appropriately located within serviced settlement centres on lands identified for such uses in the Local Area Plans. For example, the altering nature of retailing is generating a demand for food processing / packaging centres in agricultural areas. In view of the specific water borne waste management demands of such activities, the Planning Authority will encourage their location in urban areas where piped wastewater disposal facilities are available.

6.4 FORESTRY

The National Spatial Strategy (Section 5.2.3) indicates that the acceleration of forestry development has resulted in a noticeable change in rural landscapes which will continue in the coming years with the momentum of Ireland's forestry programme. The NSS states that with effective management, based on coherent policy guidelines, this change can be a positive force by:

- Harnessing the national potential for producing forestry products, including the use of under-utilised agricultural lands, the adding of value to timber products in Ireland and further developing regional specialisations such as the furniture sector in the North East;
- Promoting forestry to address concerns regarding greenhouse gas emissions;
- Fostering rural tourism development through forests as attractions, with rights of way for long distance walking;
- Promoting the positive dimensions of the rural landscape by encouraging diversity of species and sensitive landscaping;
- Contributing positively to the forestry and forestry products sector through the county development plan process by identifying areas suitable for and sensitive to afforestation, and;
- Recognising the potential for forestry to contribute to integrated development by complementing other land uses e.g. by providing leisure amenities.

County Meath has one of the lowest ratios of planted area in the state. In order to facilitate guidance on areas which contain opportunities for the creation of new woodland and areas which might be sensitive to new forestry proposals, the Landscape Characterisation Assessment of the

county should be consulted (Appendix VI). The preparation of an Indicative Integrated Forestry Strategy for the County by the Forest Service would identify areas of opportunity for the creation of new woodland for environmental or recreational use as well as areas that would be sensitive to afforestation. At present, the Forest Service are concentrating on the production of a strategic forestry map for each county, using existing GIS datasets, which will identify existing, preferred, potential and sensitive forestry areas. The "preferred areas" are those areas with the greatest potential for primarily commercial forestry. The objective of this map is to give an early indication of the areas where potentially sensitive issues might arise in relation to, for example, landscape, water quality, archaeology and biodiversity. There are also areas that are unsuitable for forest planting including, for example, important wildlife habitats such as peatlands, Special Areas of Conservation, etc.

The introduction of large scale forestry areas can have negative impacts on an area if they are not in context with the surrounding environment. Forestry activities must be appropriate in terms of nature and scale to the surrounding area, so they are not visually obtrusive on the landscape or cause damage to important habitats or the ecology of the area. The use of native species or a broadleaf / conifer mixture and age class diversity can enhance the visual impact and biodiversity of forests.

At all times, the recommendations of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food guidelines on forestry and fisheries, archaeology and landscape will be pursued. In addition, the Planning Authority will encourage the provision of public access to new forests through walking and bridle paths, recreational areas and other similar facilities. The appropriateness of a given site will also be determined by reference to any effects upon established housing which might be enveloped and the proposed manner of transporting harvested timber and the adequacy of transport routes for haulage.

GOAL

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.

POLICIES

RD POL 5	To encourage sustainable forestry development, which is planted, managed and harvested in accordance with the published Forest Service Guidelines for Landscape, Forest Harvesting and Environmental, Archaeology, Biodiversity and Water Quality.
RD POL 6	To promote forestry development of an appropriate scale and character whilst ensuring that the development does not have a negative visual impact on the countryside or cause pollution or degradation to wildlife habitats, natural waters or areas of ecological importance.
RD POL 7	To encourage the provision of public access to new forests through walking and bridle paths, recreational areas and other similar facilities.

OBJECTIVES

RD OBJ 2	To prepare a Thematic Spatial Strategy for forestry which, if properly harnessed, can positively facilitate many other land uses including often difficult land use types and objectives such as aquifer and surface water protection, tourism, rural housing, mineral extraction, industry and the provision of infrastructure location.
RD OBJ 3	To co-operate with the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to encourage and promote the preparation and implementation of an Indicative Forest Strategy for the County.
RD OBJ 4	To continue to involve the Local Authority in the NeighbourWood Scheme and to identify areas at local level that are suitable for woodland.

6.5 TREE PRESERVATION

Throughout the county, series of trees or groupings of trees have been identified as being of particular importance or value to the area. As a means of protecting these areas of planting, Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) have been made for the sites shown in the Landscape Character Assessment.

Notwithstanding the existence of TPOs, it is recognised that in some instance tree felling will be unavoidable over the life of the Plan. Where felling of trees is unavoidable, new planting will be required and native species tree planting encouraged. The Planning Authority will consult with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and forestry services regarding its recommendations on Tree Felling Licence applications.

POLICIES

RD POL 8	To ensure the preservation of any tree, trees or groups of trees or woodland of special amenity or environmental value by use of Tree Preservation Orders.
RD POL 9	To require the submission of landscape plans to accompany planning applications for rural development as prepared by competent professionals with regard to the lodging of planning applications for rural development and shall in any event seek to promote the use of deciduous trees for boundary treatment and as use for shelter belts.
RD POL 10	To resist proposals to remove woodland, boundary trees or hedgerow planting, where such planting is of benefit to the visual and ecological amenity of an area.

6.6 EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRY AND BUILDING MATERIALS PRODUCTION

Meath contains a variety of natural resources such as building raw materials in the form of sand, gravel, stone reserves including high purity limestones and shale used in cement and magnesia manufacture and base metal deposits. The potential of these resources to underpin construction output and provide employment and economic growth in the local and regional economy is recognised as is the need to exploit these in an environmentally sound and sustainable manner. Recycling of construction and demolition waste should over time have a consequential reduction in the need for new quarries. By their nature, aggregates can only be worked where they occur. The wide distribution of resources is recognised and particular known deposits and sites have been mapped. In this regard, the preparation of this Development Plan has been informed by the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) Aggregate Potential Mapping which in addition to mapping potential sand and gravel deposits, assesses the interactions between the development of these resources and future land uses. These maps are acknowledged as not being exhaustive and additional reserves may adjoin those shown on Maps 6.1 & 6.4 in the accompanying Environmental Statement. The preparation of the Environmental Statement only had regard to existing available published data.

The cost of haulage effects the economic competitiveness in this sector and accordingly, extractive industries seek to locate proximate to developing settlements and major existing and proposed roads, thus minimising haulage costs as travel to end users is reduced. This inevitably leads to conflicts and environmental concerns. Extractive industries are temporary uses by their nature but can give rise to detrimental environmental and residential amenity effects including traffic generation, vibration, dust, noise, water pollution, visual intrusion and loss of ground water supplies. The impact on the road network of the County is significant.

GOAL

To ensure adequate supplies of aggregate resources to meet the future growth needs of the County.

POLICIES

RD POL 11	To facilitate the exploitation of the county's natural resources and to exercise control over the types of development taking place in areas containing proven or potential deposits, whilst also ensuring that such industries are carried out in a manner which would not unduly impinge on the visual amenity or environment quality of the area.
RD POL 12	To protect the finite aggregate resources, in such areas of known or potential aggregate sources, whereby only development compatible with mining or quarrying activities shall be permitted in areas being or likely to be used for these purposes.
RD POL 13	To ensure that extractive industries do not adversely affect the environment or adjoining existing land uses.

RD POL 14	To ensure that the extractive industry minimises adverse impacts on the road network in the area and that the full cost of road improvements which are necessary to facilitate extractive industries are borne by the industry itself.
RD POL 15	To ensure that the extraction of minerals and aggregates is carried out in a manner to minimise the detracting from the visual quality of the landscape.
RD POL 16	To ensure that all existing workings shall be rehabilitated to suitable land uses and that all future extraction activities will allow for the rehabilitation of pits and proper land use management. The use of land filling with inert material is the preferred method. However, each planning application shall be considered on a case by case basis and where relevant will be dealt with under the Waste Management Plan.
RD POL 17	To ensure that development for aggregates / mineral extraction, processing and associated concrete production does not significantly impact on the following areas: 1) Existing & Proposed Special Areas of Conservation (SACs); 2) Special Protection Areas (SPAs); 3) Existing & Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs); 4) Other areas of importance for the conservation of flora and fauna; 5) Areas of significant archaeological potential; 6) In the vicinity of a recorded monument, and; 7) Sensitive landscapes.

Development Assessment Criteria

It shall be required therefore that development proposals are framed such as to address in an authoritative manner issues such as:

- The extent of the land ownership and nature of the deposits;
- The protection or conservation of water resources whether above or under ground;
- Effective control of gaseous emissions and dust;
- Noise, vibration and subsidence;
- Transportation impacts;
- Restoration and landscaping;
- Protection of identified geological or geomorphological heritage features;
- Provision of adequate securities to "self police" compliance, and;
- Assessment of impact on existing rights of way and traditional walking routes.

Further Development Assessment Criteria in this regard is also provided in Section 8.2.10 Sites of Geological Interest.

6.7 RURAL SETTLEMENT STRATEGY

6.7.1 Background

Introduction

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) recognises the long tradition of people living in rural areas and promotes sustainable rural settlement as a key component of delivering more balanced regional development. The latter involves utilising and developing the economic resources of rural areas, particularly in agriculture and food, marine, tourism, forestry, renewable energy, enterprise and local services, whilst at the same time capitalising on and drawing strength from vibrant neighbouring urban areas. The development of these sectors has a key role to play as primary economic bases for vibrant and diversified communities in rural areas and the retention of the rural population.

The NSS outlines four broad objectives as a basis for a sustainable rural settlement policy framework:

- 1) *To sustain and renew established rural communities and the existing stock of investment in a way that responds to various spatial, structural and economic changes taking place, while protecting the important assets rural areas possess;*
- 2) *To strengthen the established structure of villages and smaller settlements both to assist local economies and to accommodate additional population in a way that supports the viability of public transport and local infrastructure and services such as schools and water services;*
- 3) *To ensure that key assets in rural areas such as water quality, the natural and cultural heritage and the quality of the landscape are protected to support quality of life and economic vitality, and;*
- 4) *To ensure that rural settlement policies take account of and are appropriate to local circumstances.*

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) published 'Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities' in April, 2005. These Guidelines were published pursuant to Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000. Meath County Council have had regard to these Guidelines in the preparation and adoption of this Development Plan.

The Guidelines outline in Section 2.1., that in supporting housing development patterns in rural areas that are sustainable, policies and practices of Planning Authorities should seek to:

- 1) *Ensure that the needs of rural communities are identified in the development plan process and that policies are put in place to ensure that the type and scale of development in rural areas, at appropriate locations, necessary to sustain rural communities is accommodated, and;*
- 2) *Manage pressure for overspill development from urban areas in the rural areas closest to the main cities and towns such as the gateways, hubs, and other large towns.*

An important task in addressing these aims is identifying future needs of rural communities and setting out policies for acceptable development in the development plan.

Planning Authorities should aim, therefore, to support the following overarching policy objectives in their policies, practices and actions.

- Support development needed to sustain and renew established rural communities;
- Ensure that the planning system guides development to the right locations in rural areas

- thereby protecting natural and man-made assets in those areas, and;
- Analyse the different types of economic, social and physical circumstances of different types of rural areas and to tailor planning policies to respond to these differing local circumstances.

The publication of the Guidelines resulted from the National Spatial Strategy which called for settlement policies in development plans and their implementation to take into account both the differing demands for rural areas and varying rural development contexts. The NSS calls for different responses to managing dispersed rural settlement between rural areas under strong urban influence, stronger rural areas, structurally weak areas and predominately dispersed settlement areas.

Key to the debate, is the differentiation between urban generated housing and rural generated housing. Urban generated housing is housing in rural locations sought by people living and working in urban areas, including second homes / holiday homes whereas rural generated housing is defined as housing needed in rural areas within the established rural community by people working in rural areas or in nearby urban areas. With regard to urban generated housing in the open countryside, the NSS asserts that development driven by urban areas should take place within built-up areas or land identified, through the development plan process, and that rural generated housing needs should be accommodated in the areas in which they arise, subject to good planning practice.

It is acknowledged that difficulties in securing affordable and high quality housing in the towns and villages of the commuting area of the County, and more recently in the more rural villages and gaugs, are a significant factor as to why many people seek to build houses in the open countryside. It is clear from the Guidelines that an analytically based and plan led approach is required in the preparation of a Development Plan. The planning system must aim for consistency and transparency in the application and interpretation of development plan policy criteria in the assessment of all applications.

This Development Plan will put an overall settlement strategy in place that ensures that the towns, villages and gaugs offer attractive and affordable housing options to meet the housing needs of rural communities and persons willing to live in urban areas. This in turn will mitigate excessive levels of pressure for urban generated development in rural areas, especially those closest to the environs of the larger towns. It will also enhance the availability and affordability of sites and housing in rural areas to meet the housing needs of the established rural community.

2001 - 2007 County Development Plan Policy

The rural settlement policy of the 2001 County Development Plan sought to channel housing development in rural areas into gaugs and other designated development centres and to ensure that individual housing developments in rural areas were functionally and socially linked to the rural areas in which they were proposed. This approach is a fundamental principle of the County Development Strategy supported by national and regional planning guidelines. The Sustainable Development Objectives recognised that people living in rural areas play an important role in supporting a dynamic rural economy and social structure.

The 2001 - 2007 County Development Plan characterised the county into differing areas with varying rural housing policy responses recognising that a "one size fits all" approach to the County did not reflect the differing development, demographic and social distinctions between various parts of

the County. This manifested itself in terms of differing development pressures shown graphically on the Rural Detail maps. The policy response differentiated between areas of high or medium development pressure and areas of low development pressure / population decline and included guidance on the requirements of the Planning Authority in relation to those housing categories that would be accommodated in rural areas accordingly. It was indicated that the Planning Authority would, in all cases, support proposals for individual dwellings on suitable sites in rural areas where the applicant could clearly demonstrate a genuine need for a dwelling on the basis that the applicant was substantially involved in agriculture.

The south and south-east of the county were classified as “areas of high and medium development pressure”, as a consequence of their location proximate to the Metropolitan Area. It was the policy of the Planning Authority to support a limited level of individual dwellings primarily for persons socially or functionally linked to the rural area in which the development proposal was situated, subject to a number of criteria being adhered to. In the remaining areas of “low development pressure”, mainly situated to the north and west of the county, whilst the need to establish a “local need” prevailed, it was the policy to support individual housing development on suitable sites in order to promote and retain a strong social and demographic structure.

Identifying Rural Area Types

The Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines stress the importance of research and analysis being carried out into population and development trends in rural areas before Planning Authorities initiate the process of drafting the written statement. This analysis should include the identification of the location and extent of the rural area types set out in Section 5.3.2 of the National Spatial Strategy.

As outlined in the preceding section, the 2001 - 2007 County Development Plan policy response differentiated between areas of high or medium development pressure and areas of low development pressure / population decline. The development pressure area included over half of the county east of a line from Slane – Navan – Trim – Longwood with Kells and an area around Clonard on the former N4 also included. This perhaps was too simplistic a breakdown of rural area type based solely upon analysis of development pressure for one off rural housing.

For the review of the County Development Plan, the Planning Authority carried out a detailed assessment in accordance with the approach outlined in the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines. The assessment has been carried out for the period in which the 2001 County Development Plan has been operating, namely from March 2001 – October 2005. This has involved:

- Mapping the location of all planning applications for one off rural housing including mapping the decisions of each (grant and refusal) based on the Planning Departments I-Plan Intranet Planning System;
- Mapping the location of rural one off houses being developed using the An Post Geo Directory data set over the period (maps actual change in addresses), and;
- Mapping and commentary provided by the “Socio Economic Profile” prepared by the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis, NUI Maynooth on behalf of the Meath County Development Board as part of the review of the County Development Board Strategy “Le Chéile”.

This analysis has broadly identified three area types for the purposes of the Development Plan which are presented on the accompanying map. Brief descriptions of the areas are provided below, defining the key characteristics associated within each 'rural area type', the geographic location of the specific areas within the county and the critical issues facing the area type. The book of maps which accompanies the County Development Plan map the Rural Area Types (Map 6.1).

Area 1 - Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence

This area exhibits the characteristics of proximity to the immediate environs or close commuting catchment of Dublin, with a rapidly rising population and evidence of considerable pressure for development of housing due to proximity to such urban areas. These areas broadly correspond with the three economic development clusters within the County which areas are based upon the strategic transportation corridors (both existing and proposed) that traverse the County with ready access to the Dublin Metropolitan Area. This area includes the commuter-belt and peri-urban areas of the county, and are the areas that are experiencing the most development pressure for one-off rural housing. The extent of this rural area type closely matches the extent of the development pressure area identified in the 2001 - 2007 County Development Plan.

Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence are characterised by above average levels of married people, as well as above average levels of young adults (those in the 25-44 year age category). This cluster is the one characterised by the highest mean population densities, as well as by far the greatest rate of population growth. This suggests that the areas within this cluster act as attractive residential locations for the rapid inflow of migrants into the county.

It is acknowledged that this area also includes a significant number of Electoral Divisions which the NIRSA Socio Economic Profile has classified as "Strong Rural Areas". Having regard to the number of existing rural dwellings located in this area (Geo Directory) and the development pressure as testified by the number of one off housing planning applications, these areas have been included in this category of area type. The Planning Department will closely monitor a number of these DEDs over the life of the County Development Plan. These DED's are Kilmore, Culmullin, Gallow and Rodanstown (which all lie roughly between Summerhill and Dunboyne) along with Rathfeigh and Tara in the Navan Electoral Area. These DED's are under significant development pressure and having regard to the number of one off housing being developed in these areas, it is expected that the socio economic profile of these areas will reverse the trends evident between 1996 - 2002. Nonetheless, by virtue of the number of applications for one off housing and the existing level of one off housing in these rural areas in tandem with their geographical positioning, these DED's are included in this category.

Area 2 - Strong Rural Areas

This area is underpinned primarily by relative levels of residential stability compared to Area Type 1 within a well developed town and village structure and in the wider rural area around them. This stability is supported by a traditionally strong agricultural economic base and the level of individual housing development activity in these areas tends to be lower than that within Area Type 1 and confined to certain areas.

This area type is to be found in mainly rural areas along a spine from the north of the county (Meath Hill, Drumcondrath, Lobinstown and Grangegeeth) east of and including Kells as far as Kildalkey with pockets around Clonard, Hill of Down, Killyon, Rathmolyon, Laracor and Oldcastle. The urban centres of Kells, Athboy and Slane are also included in this category. This area has less of a tradition of

urban settlement although centres such as Kells, Athboy, Slane, Clonard, Rathmolyon and Kildalkey by virtue of their geographical positioning are under varying degrees of development pressure and are expanding. This area is under more moderate pressure for one off housing development than the rural areas under strong urban influence. It is considered necessary to have a relatively stricter rural housing policy in place in the immediate environs of these development centres (Kells, Athboy & Slane) similar to that applying to Area Type 1 above.

The key challenge to be addressed in this area is to maintain a reasonable balance between development activity in the extensive network of smaller towns and villages and housing proposals in the wider rural area.

Area 3 - Low Development Pressure Areas

This area type covers much of the north-western, western and south-western parts of the county. This area is associated with relatively high levels of residential stability, as is evidenced in a relatively lower rate of population growth, high level of non-mortgaged owner occupied housing, above average percentages of family households and high rates of agricultural employment. In addition, the electoral divisions in this area type have the lowest average population densities, as well as lower than average levels of new housing, third level graduates, and people who are travelling 90 minutes or more in their daily journey to work. This area has experienced the lowest rate of applications for one off housing since the adoption of the 2001 - 2007 County Development Plan. This area has the weakest urban structure within the county and the rural housing policy applicable should reflect same.

The key challenge in this area is to arrest population and economic decline with a focus on the role of smaller rural villages and graigs in tandem with rural areas.

6.7.2 Policy Approach

The Settlement Strategy of this Development Plan identifies two separate Rural Policy Areas within County Meath as follows :

- 1) One Off Rural Housing – Referring to housing outside of the identified development boundaries of any of the rural settlements and on any unzoned land throughout the County.
- 2) Rural Villages and Graigs – Referring to villages in rural areas of a small scale for which Local Area Plans will be prepared and graigs for which graig design statements will be proposed.

6.7.3 One Off Housing in the Countryside

The preceding section has identified three broad areas and the accompanying map (Map 6.1) should be read as broad brushed, particularly at the edges of electoral divisions where two area types converge. It shall not be the intention of the Planning Authority to be prejudicial against any applicant, who through their application can confirm the bona fides of their claim for local rural housing in certain particular circumstances that may be unique to their application, notwithstanding its location within a particular rural area type.

Notwithstanding this, and in line with DoEHLG Guidance on the subject, it is considered appropriate and necessary to provide different goals, policies and development assessment criteria for each area type. To this end, elaboration on certain definitions / applicant types is necessary and as such is outlined below.

6.7.3.1

Persons who are an Intrinsic Part of the Rural Community

The Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines outline that Planning Authorities in formulating policies recognise the importance to rural people of family ties and ties to a local area such as a parish, townland or the catchment of local schools and sporting clubs. Such policies can deliver positive benefits for rural areas and sustain rural communities by allowing people to build in their local areas on suitable sites.

The Planning Authority will support proposals for individual dwellings on suitable sites in rural areas where the applicant can clearly demonstrate a genuine need for a dwelling on the basis that the applicant is significantly involved in agriculture. In these cases, it will be required that the applicant satisfy the Planning Authority with supporting documentation that the nature of the agricultural activity, by reference to the area of land and / or the intensity of its usage, is sufficient to support full time or significant part time occupation. It is also considered that persons taking over the ownership and running of family farms along with the sons and daughters of farmers would be considered within this category of local need.

The Planning Authority will similarly support applications for one off houses for persons whose significant employment is in the bloodstock industry, forestry, agri-tourism or horticulture sectors and who can demonstrate a need to live in a rural area in the immediate vicinity of their employment in order to carry out their employment. The same requirements to submit supporting documentation as outlined above will be required in this instance.

In both instances above which relate to natural resources related employment, the applicant shall satisfy the Planning Authority as to the significance of their employment. Where persons are employed in a part time capacity, the predominant occupation shall be farming / natural resource related. It should be noted, that where an applicant is also a local of the area, the onus of proof with regard to demonstrating the predominance of the agricultural or rural resource employment shall not normally be required.

The Planning Authority recognises the interest of persons local to or linked to a rural area, who are not engaged in significant agricultural or rural resource related occupation, to live in rural areas. Certain special needs are also recognised in terms of tradespeople, persons with rural family linkages and social needs. For the purposes of this policy section, persons local to an area are considered to include:

- Persons who have spent substantial periods of their lives, living in rural areas as members of the established rural community for a period in excess of five years and who do not possess a dwelling or who have not possessed a dwelling in the past, in which they have resided or who possess a dwelling in which they do not currently reside.
- Persons who were originally from rural areas and who are in substandard or unacceptable housing scenarios and who have continuing close family ties with rural communities such as being a mother, father, brother, sister, son, daughter, son in law, or daughter in law of a long established member of the rural community being a person resident rurally for at least ten years;
- Returning emigrants who have lived for substantial parts of their lives in rural areas, then moved abroad and who now wish to return to reside near other family members, to work locally, to care for elderly members of their family or to retire, and;

- Persons, whose employment is rurally based, such as teachers in rural primary schools or whose work predominantly takes place within the rural area in which they are seeking to build their first home, or is suited to rural locations such as farm hands or trades-people and who have a housing need.

The Planning Authority also recognises that exceptional health circumstances may require a person to live in a particular environment or close to family support. In such cases, the exceptional health circumstances would require supporting documentation from a registered medical practitioner and a disability organisation supporting a planning application. In the absence of any significant environmental, access or traffic reasons for refusal and the proposal adheres to sensitive design and siting criteria, the Planning Authority will consider granting planning permission, subject where appropriate to conditions regarding occupancy.

Where an applicant for a one off house in the countryside can demonstrate, by the submission of documentary evidence, that their original dwelling was sold due to unavoidable financial circumstances, such applications will be considered on their individual merits, where the applicant satisfies local housing need criteria. This consideration does not override the other normal assessment criteria as set out in this Development Plan for a one off house.

Where an applicant has resided in a rural area for a considerable period of time, being a period of time in excess of the previous 10 consecutive years, in a dwelling attached to their business, such as farming, and the business inclusive of dwelling house is being sold for retirement or other circumstances, such applications will be considered on their individual merits, where the applicant satisfies local housing need criteria. The planning officer shall specify the nature of documentation required in pre planning to support such a planning application or upon request in writing. This consideration does not override the other normal assessment criteria as set out in this Development Plan for a one off house.

The Planning Authority also recognises persons who have been an intrinsic part of the rural community for substantial periods of their lives and where their family home was traditionally regarded as being part of the rural area but due to the expansion of the towns and villages now forms part of or abuts the development boundary. A person whose family home and adjoining lands have been zoned in the extension of the development boundary shall not benefit from such consideration in this regard. This shall relate to lands subsumed within individual development boundaries of new Local Area Plans and Development Plans made after the adoption of this Development Plan.

GOAL

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.

STRATEGIC POLICIES

RUR DEV SP 1

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.

Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence

POLICIES

RD POL 18

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.

RD POL 19

To facilitate the housing requirements of the rural community as identified while directing urban generated housing to areas zoned for new housing development in towns and villages in the area of the development plan.

RD POL 20

To protect areas falling within the greenbelt of urban centres in this Area Type from urban generated and unsightly ribbon development and to maintain the identity of these urban centres.

Please note that in all instances where ribbon development is referred to in this Development Plan, the example contained in Appendix 4 of the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities as published by the DoEHLG in April 2005 shall apply. Ribbon development is considered to be a high density of almost continuous road frontage type development, for example where 5 or more houses exist on any one side of a given 250 metres of road frontage. Whether a given proposal will exacerbate such ribbon development or could be considered will depend on:

- The type of rural area and circumstances of the applicant;
- The degree to which the proposal might be considered infill development, and;
- The degree to which existing ribbon development would be extended or whether distinct areas of ribbon development would coalesce as a result of the development.

Meath County Council will endeavour to arrive at a balanced and reasonable view in the interpretation of the above criteria taking account of local circumstances, including the planning history of the area and development pressures.

Development Assessment Criteria

The Planning Authority will also take into account the following matters in assessing individual proposals for one off rural housing within this area type:

- The housing need background of the applicant(s) in terms of employment, strong social links to rural areas and immediate family as defined in Section 6.7.3.1 Persons who are an Intrinsic Part of the Rural Community;
- Local circumstances such as the degree to which the surrounding area has been developed and any tendencies in terms of it becoming overdeveloped;
- The degree of existing development on the original landholding from which the site is taken including the extent to which previously permitted rural housing has been retained in family occupancy. Where there is a history of individual residential development on the landholding through the speculative sale of sites, permission may be refused;
- The suitability of the site in terms of access, wastewater disposal and house location relative to other policies and objectives of this plan;
- In the case of the first son or daughter of farmers applying on family lands, to encourage that such proposals facilitate clustered or grouped family type housing for subsequent members of the family set back into the landscape rather than scattered ribbon type development, and;
- The degree to which the proposal might be considered infill development.

Strong Rural Areas

POLICIES

RD POL 21	To consolidate and sustain the stability of the rural population and to strive to achieve a balance between development activity in urban areas and villages and the wider rural area.
RD POL 22	To facilitate the housing requirements of the rural community as identified while directing urban generated housing to areas zoned for new housing development in towns and villages in the area of the development plan.
RD POL 23	To protect areas within the vicinity of Kells, Athboy and Slane from urban generated and unsightly ribbon development and to maintain the identity of the towns.
RD POL 24	To monitor population and development trends within this area type in order to identify areas at risk from population decline and trigger policies aimed at encouraging appropriate levels of new development in rural areas and in smaller settlements.

Development Assessment Criteria

The considerations outlined above in Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence in assessing individual proposals for one off rural housing will also to apply to this area type.

- For the purposes of assessing whether or not a person is intrinsically part of the rural community in a stronger rural area, this shall disregard the fact that the family home(s) of the applicant in which the applicant(s) have spent the majority of their lives in within the development boundary of Drumcondrath or a graig for which a Design Statement is being prepared.

Low Development Pressure Areas

POLICY

RD POL 25	To accommodate demand for permanent residential development as it arises subject to good practice in matters such as design, location and the protection of important landscapes and any environmentally sensitive areas.
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Development Assessment Criteria

- The considerations outlined above in Rural Areas under Strong Urban Influence in assessing individual proposals for one off rural housing will also apply to this area type.
- For the purposes of assessing whether or not a person is intrinsically part of the rural community in an area under low development pressure, this shall disregard the fact that the family home(s) of the applicant(s) in which the applicant(s) have spent the majority of their lives in within the development boundary of a rural village for which a Local Area Plan is being prepared or of a graig for which a Design Statement is being prepared.

All Areas

POLICY

RD POL 26	To encourage architectural styles that compliment local traditions such as the "Land Commission House" and other traditional building forms and to resist building styles inappropriate to a rural area and / or developing rural villages.
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OBJECTIVE

RD OBJ 5	To prepare Rural Dwelling Design and Development Guidelines within one year of the adoption of this Development Plan.
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6.7.4 Rural Villages and Graigs

A significant feature of the 2001 - 2007 County Development Plan was the identification of a wide range of smaller urban nodes, crossroad type villages and similar centres. It is readily acknowledged that the range of villages for which Local Area Plans will be prepared and smaller centres referred to as "Graigs" have much potential to relieve rural development pressures. Such rural centres are considered to contain the potential to consolidate rural development needs and support the maintenance of essential rural social and community infrastructure such as schools, shops, public

houses, post offices and local sporting organisations. This is acknowledged in the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines whereby it is stated that using the development plan process and local area plan processes, Planning Authorities should make every effort to harness all of the measures available to them to ensure that sufficient high quality, well located and affordable development can take place in rural villages.

It is accepted that the experience in terms of the operation of the 'Graig' Policy over the period since the 2001 - 2007 County Development Plan was adopted has been mixed.

- It is acknowledged that Village Action Plans to guide development within these centres were to be prepared pursuant to the policy contained in the Development Plan but have not been prepared to date. This would have resulted in the necessary upgrading of social, community and other infrastructure as part of development proposals been realised such as footpaths, play areas, community buildings, etc.
- The Planning Authority also indicated that they would proactively seek to acquire land within graigs to provide a level of affordable and social housing to address local housing needs. It is only in recent times that such acquisitions have come to fruition and it is anticipated that a template can now be developed. In many instances, locals are now experiencing affordability difficulties within graigs as landowners consider that such lands have the benefit of land use zoning.
- It was envisaged that initiatives such as "Housing Co-operatives" would be welcomed whereby local people through co-operative action, combine to enable the comprehensive development of land. To date, no Housing Co-operative in a graig has developed.
- The graigs identified in the 2001 - 2007 County Development Plan were classified as wet or dry graigs dependent on whether or not grouped wastewater treatment facilities could be provided. The net result is that some of the indepth residential schemes in wet graigs resemble suburban style estates that do not respect the character of the graigs whilst in dry graigs the form of urban design constitute individual dwelling design on half acre sites. There is a fundamental urban design issue to be resolved in conjunction with the Infrastructure and Environment Departments in this regard. The result to date has been a loss of the character and setting of these rural clusters.

Whilst the strategy of the Planning Authority is to maximise the potential of its graigs and smaller rural villages to accommodate primarily rural housing needs, it is recognised that the accommodation of rural housing needs will require that these rural nodes are protected from metropolitan or urban overspill. In order to realise this potential of satisfying an element of the rural housing needs of persons who are an intrinsic part of a rural area within smaller rural villages and graigs, such housing options must be attractive and affordable.

Given the likely future development patterns in major towns, improvements in accessibility and the attractiveness in quality of life and affordability terms, small villages face increasing development pressures from those wishing to move from large urban and city areas. This can in turn have knock-on repercussions for the affordability of housing and housing land in villages for rural dwellers. There is therefore a major development challenge in harnessing the development potential of these centres on the one hand, while protecting these resources for essentially local or rurally derived

housing needs on the other. It is considered that the measures proposed in this Development Plan that ensure that a set percentage of lands in smaller towns and villages is reserved for locally derived need will assist in overcoming the affordability issues. This will require regular monitoring during the life of the new County Development Plan.

GOAL

To ensure that the variety of smaller rural villages and graigs located across the County offer attractive and affordable housing options to meet the needs of the established rural communities.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

As outlined in the subsection "Identifying Rural Area Types", 3 Rural Area Types have been identified for the purpose of the Development Plan.

The primary objective in relation to smaller rural villages and graigs in Rural Areas Under Strong Urban Influence is consolidation. Rural villages and graigs in this area type have experienced significant levels of growth in the past. In many cases, this growth was urban generated and the size and scale of the houses built in these villages did not reflect the needs of the first time home owner from the local community. Having regard to the scale and rapid pace of growth in recent years, it is considered that the capacity of these villages to absorb further growth is very limited. It is an objective that new housing shall be for local need category only.

The primary objective in relation to smaller rural villages and graigs in strong rural areas is strengthening. Rural villages and graigs in this category have experienced some growth in recent years. It is considered that they have the capacity to accommodate limited growth having regard to the availability of adequate social infrastructure.

The primary objective in relation to rural villages and graigs in low development pressure areas is regeneration and rejuvenation. Villages and graigs in this category have experienced reduced levels of growth in recent years and have limited social and community facilities. Population growth will be encouraged to ensure a critical mass to enable investment in social and physical infrastructure. In this regard, the intention is to accommodate both local need and local growth, with a particular emphasis on local growth in order to attract sufficient population levels to promote efficiency in the use of services, infrastructure, energy, transport and natural resources, and to sustain and renew these communities.

OBJECTIVES

RD OBJ 6

To prepare Graig Design Statements in consultation with local communities and key stakeholders for all of the 53 settlements listed in Appendix II to inform planners, designers and decision makers of the local community's needs in relation to future development. The preparation of these Graig Design Statements shall be within two years of this Development Plan being adopted.

The Graig Design Statements shall provide, inter alia, the following:

- i) Define Graig boundary taking account of the existing form and character of the settlement;
- ii) Objectives for the retention of the distinctive character of the settlement and to provide recommendations relating to the various ways that new development can harmonise with the existing settlement form;
- iii) Infrastructural proposals including the method of provided piped water services (where possible) to serve the graig;
- iv) Objectives for the retention and / or provision of open space, amenity and recreational amenities to serve the rural catchment;
- v) Graig improvement proposals;
- vi) Objectives with regard to the funding of services through Local Authority funds and / or Development Contribution Scheme funds;
- vii) Heritage objectives;
- viii) Sites for the provision of housing for the rural community, including suitable infill opportunities;
- ix) Sites for the provision and accommodation of rural enterprise / employment generating uses, and;
- x) Other development objectives as appropriate in relation to the character, form and scale of the graig and its centre.

Such Design Statements will be indicative only and should not be construed as setting out formal land use zoning objectives under the provisions of the Planning & Development Acts. The zoning of land for residential purposes would require the application of the provisions of Part V of the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended, with regard to social and affordable housing. The ultimate effect would be increasing the perceived land use value that would negate the ability of persons local to an area to be able to acquire sites and remain in the rural locality.

Pending the preparation of the Graig Design Statements and the subsequent variation of this Development Plan, applications for individual and multiple house developments will be considered on their individual merits.

RD OBJ 7

To select particular graigs to pilot combined local authority and private sector investment to stimulate attractive and affordable high quality individual housing and / or private site developments to attract population growth and further investment.

RD OBJ 8	To encourage and support measures or housing proposals that safeguard the availability of development options in Graigs for primarily locally derived housing needs. In particular, initiatives such as "Housing Co-operatives" will be welcomed, where local people through co-operative action, combine to enable the comprehensive development of land.
RD OBJ 9	To ensure that new residential development in graigs is of an individual design and density compatible with the character of its setting. Suburban type developments will not be permitted.
RD OBJ 10	The Planning Authority will consider a limited amount of cluster type development in Rural Areas outside of designated graigs for persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community with strong familial, social and functional ties to the area as set out in Section 6.7.3 (One Off Housing in the Countryside). A cluster type development shall be defined as a maximum of 5 houses for which a local housing co-operative has been formed and subject to site suitability criteria as contained in the Development Plan. Pending the satisfactory operation of a pilot cluster in each of the Electoral Areas, the Planning Authority may consent to the application of this policy on a more widespread basis.

Development Assessment Criteria

In considering developments in Graigs the Planning Authority will pursue objectives in relation to:

- In centres designated "Wet Graigs" (see Appendix II) where grouped wastewater treatment facilities may be possible, to seek the comprehensive in depth development of sites within the drainage catchment of such centres commensurate with a proportional consumption of water services and the assimilative capacity of watercourses. The provision of wastewater disposal infrastructure to service the centre as a whole, as part of a development proposal will normally be a requirement.
- In centres designated as "Dry Graigs" where piped wastewater facilities will be difficult to provide, to seek limited frontage type development within a reasonable development boundary of the centre in question and only where the Planning Authority is satisfied that acceptable standards of wastewater disposal, water supply, access and dwelling design is provided for. The use of proprietary wastewater disposal arrangements in such centres shall generally be required.

Rural Areas Under Strong Urban Influence

POLICY

RD POL 27	To ensure that the provision of housing in all graigs within identified rural areas under strong urban influence shall be reserved for persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community. This would include persons originally from a rural area who already own their own dwelling on residentially zoned land in a town or village for a period not more than 5 years.
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Strong Urban Areas**POLICY**

RD POL 28	To ensure that the provision of housing in all graigs within identified strong rural areas shall be reserved for persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community. This would include persons originally from a rural area who already own their own dwelling on residentially zoned land in a town or village for a period not more than five years.
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OBJECTIVE

RD OBJ 11	To select particular small towns and villages (and graigs) within this area type to pilot combined local authority and private sector investment to stimulate attractive and affordable high quality individual housing and / or private site developments to attract population growth and further investment.
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Low Development Pressure Areas**POLICY**

RD POL 29	To ensure that generally at least 50% of all housing proposals involving two or more dwellings in all graigs within identified rural areas experiencing low development pressure shall be reserved for persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community. This would include persons originally from a rural area who already own their own dwelling on residentially zoned land in a town or village for a period not more than five years. In order to foster local growth, persons who have been living and / or working in Co. Meath for the past 5 years and who were originally from the rural catchment of the graig and now wish to return will also be considered in such graigs.
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OBJECTIVE

RD OBJ 12	To select particular small villages and graigs within this area type to pilot combined local authority and private sector investment to stimulate attractive and affordable high quality individual housing and / or private site developments to attract population growth and further investment.
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Occupancy Conditions

The National Spatial Strategy emphasises that to secure the co-ordinated and sustainable development of the country's main cities and towns, provision of new housing in the rural areas adjacent to them that are under considerable pressure for development will need to be confined to persons with roots in or links to those areas. It is reasonable, in such circumstances, to expect that where an applicant is given planning permission for a rural housing proposal on the basis of

having such links, that the grant of planning permission makes it clear that, save for exceptional circumstances, the dwelling shall be occupied for a specified period by the applicant, members of the applicant's immediate family or any other person who has similar links.

Section 39 (2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, enables a Planning Authority and An Bord Pleanála to attach a condition to a grant of planning permission for a structure which is to be used as a dwelling, specifying that such use may be restricted to use by persons of a particular class or description and that provision to that effect shall be embodied in an agreement under Section 47 of the Act.

POLICY

RD POL 30

It shall be the policy of the Planning Authority to attach an occupancy condition to all individual one off rural dwellings, including those located in graigs, on unzoned land, pursuant to Section 47 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, restricting the use of the dwelling to the applicant and their immediate family, as a place of permanent residence. The period of occupancy will be limited to a period of 5 years from the date of first occupation. No such occupancy condition shall be imposed with respect to housing located in Rural Area Type 'Low Development Pressure Area'.

6.7.5 The Meath Gaeltachts / Gaeltachtaí na Midhe

County Meath contains two separate Gaeltachts that have been officially designated by the Department of Community, Rural, and Gaeltacht Affairs namely (a) Rathcairn, three miles south east of Athboy and (b) Baile Ghib, six miles east of Kells. The Gaeltacht area had a combined population of 1,591 persons in 2002, representing an increase of 13% since the 1996 Census. Of the total population of the county, the Gaeltacht areas represented 1.19% in 2002. The NIRSA Socio Economic Profile of the County indicated that both Gaeltacht Areas are significant industrial employment locations, relative to their size and rural nature.

There is an obligation on Planning Authorities to include objectives in the development plan for:

"the protection of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht including the promotion of Irish as the community language, where there is a Gaeltacht area in the area of the development plan."

The two key elements therefore are protection and promotion.

It has been a long standing objective of successive Governments to maintain Irish as the language of the community and of the home in the Gaeltachtaí and the Planning Authority fully supports this objective. Since their foundation in the 1930's, the Gaeltachtaí have occupied a distinctive position in terms of the cultural and linguistic heritage of the county. However, their size has entailed that they are under constant linguistic threat and current demographic patterns and development pressures are exacerbating this trend. The normal requirements to demonstrate that an applicant(s) is an intrinsic member of the rural Gaeltacht community will apply to all applications for individual developments within the defined areas of the Gaeltachtaí. This would accord with both national and regional planning guidance. Nonetheless, special consideration will be given to Irish applicants or those who would ensure the stabilisation and the promotion of Irish as a community language.

In addition to the Development Plan, Meath County Council in performance of its duties pursuant to the Acht Teanga has drafted its own plan towards providing:

- A clear policy towards bi-lingual signage;
- Attending the needs of the public and providing services in Irish;
- Attend the needs of the Gaeltacht completely in Irish, and;
- Employ persons with Irish to provide these services.

As part of this plan and to ensure the provisions of An Acht Teanga and County Council language plan are clearly met and in an efficient manner, Meath County Council proposes to employ an "Oifigeach Gaeilge" (An Irish Language Officer). The duties of this officer will include monitoring signage in the Gaeltacht and ensuring the provisions of the Plan are being implemented.

Local Area Plans will provide detailed objectives for the promotion of development in the two Meath Gaeltachts in a manner that protects and enhances their cultural distinctiveness. These will replace the existing Rathcairn and Baile Ghib Detailed Objectives & Written Statements.

GOAL

To ensure the continued survival and development of the Gaeltachtaí areas distinct in the linguistic and cultural life of the county.

POLICIES

RD POL 31	To ensure that all new development in the Gaeltachtaí have a positive impact upon the use of Irish in the area.
RD POL 32	To encourage architectural styles that complement local traditions such as the "Land Commission House" and other traditional building forms and to resist building styles inappropriate to a rural area and / or developing rural villages.
RD POL 33	<p>In the preparation of the Local Area Plans for Baile Ghib and Rathcairn, that the following fundamental principles should be taken on board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To recognise the economic, social and cultural importance of the Irish language in Gaeltacht life; • To recognise developments that could damage the use, visibility and status of the Irish language in Meath and to reduce / prevent their impact; • To identify methods whereby the Irish language can be preserved, and; • To plan an efficient system whereby the aspects of the Gaeltacht environment can be assessed and protected as part of the planning process, including the use of language conditions.

OBJECTIVES

RD OBJ 13	To require that a "Linguistic Impact Study" be carried out before any application for housing (for single and multiple housing developments) is considered within the Gaeltacht Area. Such a study, by reference to the linguistic background of intended users or occupants, or identification of its relationship with linguistic or cultural development objectives of groups associated or charged with the development of Gaeltacht areas will need to prove that a given proposal will have a positive impact upon the promotion and use of Irish as the language of the community. Developments that would have adverse impacts will not be supported by the Planning Authority.
RD OBJ 14	To promote the provision of signage in Irish in the Gaeltachts regarding: 1) Entry and exit points with explanatory details of the cultural significance of the areas to visitors; 2) The provision of all commercial signage in Irish, and; 3) In association with the relevant professional and vocational groups, that auctioneers and other temporary signs are in Irish.

Development Assessment Criteria

- To assist in assessing the impact of new residential development upon the use of Irish in the Gaeltachtaí, all planning applications for residential development, both single and multiple house developments, will be referred to the Department of Community, Rural, and Gaeltacht Affairs and Údarás na Gaeltachta Management for comment and these comments shall be taken into account and such account shall be demonstrated in the making of decisions in all such planning applications.

Gaeltachtaí na Midhe

Tá dhá cheantar ar leith i gContae na Mí atá ainmnithe go hoifigiúil mar Ghaeltachtaí ag an Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta, is iad sin (a) Ráth Chairn, trí mhíle soir ó dheas ó Bhaile Átha Buí agus (b) Baile Ghib, sé mhíle soir ó Cheanannas. Bhí daonra 1,591 ag an dá cheantar Gaeltachta le chéile sa bhliain 2002, is ionann sin agus méadú 13% ó Dhaonáireamh na bliana 1996. B'ionann daonra na gceantar Gaeltachta agus 1.19% de dhaonra iomlán an chontae sa bhliain 2002. Léirigh Próifíl Socheacnamaíochta NIRSA an Chontae gur áiteanna suntasacha d'fhostaíocht tionsclaíochta iad an dá cheantar Gaeltachta, i gcoibhneas le méid agus nádúr tuaithe na gceantar sin.

Tá dualgas ar Údarás Pleanála cuspóirí a chur sa phlean forbartha do chaomhnú oidhreacht teangeolaíochta agus chultúrtha na Gaeltachta lena n-áirítear cothú na Gaeilge mar theanga an phobail, áit a bhfuil ceantar Gaeltachta sa cheantar atá faoi chaibidil ag an bplean forbartha. Mar sin, is iad cosaint agus cothú an dá phríomheilimint.

Le fada an lá, tá sé mar aidhm ag Rialtais i ndiaidh a chéile an Ghaeilge a choinneáil mar theanga an phobail agus an teaghligh sna Gaeltachtaí agus tacaíonn an tÚdarás Aitiúil go hiomlán leis an gcuspóir seo. Ó bunaíodh sna 1930í iad, tá suíomh suntasach ag na Gaeltachtaí maidir le hoidhreacht chultúrtha agus teangeolaíochta an chontae. Mar sin féin, mar thoradh ar a méid, tá siad i gcontúirt teangeolaíochta i gcónaí, agus tá an scéal ag dul in olcas mar thoradh ar phatrúin dhéimeagrafacha agus brúnna forbartha. Beidh na gnáthriachtanais (i.e. a thaispeáint go bhfuil

iarrthóir(i) ina c(h)omhalta/gcomhaltaí go hintreach de phobal tuaithe Gaeltachta) i bhfeidhm maidir le gach iarratas aonair laistigh de cheantair shainithe na nGaeltachtaí. Bheadh sé seo ag teacht le treoír pleanála, idir náisiúnta agus réigiúnda. Mar sin féin, déanfar machnamh speisialta maidir le hiarrthóirí Éireannacha nó iarrthóirí a chinnteodh daingniú agus cothú na Gaeilge mar theanga phobail.

Chomh maith leis an bPlean Forbartha, mar chomhlíonadh ar dhualgais faoi réir an Achta Teanga, tá plean dá cuid féin dréachtaithe ag Comhairle Contae na Mí chun:

- Polasaí soiléir a sholáthar maidir le comharthaí dhátheangacha;
- Freastal ar riachtanais an phobail agus seirbhísí a sholáthar as Gaeilge;
- Freastal ar riachtanais na Gaeltachta go hiomlán as Gaeilge, agus;
- Daoine le Gaeilge a fhostú chun na seirbhísí seo a sholáthar.

Mar chuid den phlean seo agus d'fhonn a chinntiú go gcomhlíontar forálacha an Achta Teanga agus Phlean Teanga na Comhairle Contae ar bhealach soiléir agus éifeachtach, tá sé de rún ag Comhairle Contae na Mí Oifigeach Gaeilge a fhostú. I measc na ndualgas a bheidh ag an oifigeach seo beidh monatóireacht ar chomharthaí sa Ghaeltacht agus cinntiú go bhfuil forálacha an Phlean á gcur i bhfeidhm.

Cuirfidh Pleananna Áitiúla cuspóirí mionsonraithe ar fáil le forbairt a chothú i nGaeltachtaí na Mí ar bhealach a chosnaíonn agus a fheabhsaíonn a sainiúlacht chultúrtha. Beidh said seo in áit na Sainchuspóirí Uirbeacha atá ann faoi láthair do Ráth Chairn agus Baile Ghib.

AIDHM

Beocht agus forbairt leanúnach na nGaeltachtaí a chinntiú mar cheantar sainiúil i saol teangeolaíochta agus cultúrtha an chontae.

POLASAÍ

RD Polasaí 31	A chinntiú go bhfuil tionchar dearfach ag gach forbairt nua sna Gaeltachtaí ar úsáid na Gaeilge sa cheantar.
RD Polasaí 32	Stíleanna ailtireachta a chothú atá ag teacht le traidisiúin áitiúla ar nós "Teach Choimisiún an Talún" agus leaganacha tógála traidisiúnta eile agus cur i gcoinne stíleanna tógála nach bhfuil oiriúnach do cheantar tuaithe agus/nó sráidbhailte tuaithe atá ag forbairt.
RD Polasaí 33	Ní mór na nithe seo a leanas a chur san áireamh de réir mar atáthar ag ullmhú le haghaidh na bPleananna Limistéir Áitiúil do Bhaile Ghib agus Ráth Cairn: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Tábhacht eacnamaíochta, shóisialta agus chultúrtha na Gaeilge i saol na Gaeltachta a aithint; · Forbairtí a aithint a d'fheadfadh dochar a dhéanamh d'úsáid, d'inmharthanacht agus do stádas na Gaeilge sa Mhí agus a dtionchar a laghdú/a dtionchar a chosc; · Modhanna a aithint trínar féidir an Ghaeilge a chaomhnú, agus; · Córas éifeachtach a phleanáil mar ar féidir gnéithe de thimpeallacht na Gaeltachta a mheas agus a chaomhnú mar chuid den phróiseas pleanála, lena n-áirítear úsáid coinníollacha teanga.

CUSPÓIR

RD Cuspóir 13	A éileamh go ndéanfar "Staidéar Iarmharta Teanga" sula ndéantar aon iarratas ar thithíocht (d'fhorbairtí tithíochta singil agus iolracha) laistigh de Cheantar na Gaeltachta a mheas. Agus tagairt á dhéanamh aige do chúla teangeolaíochta na n-úsáideoirí nó na sealbhóirí atá beartaithe, nó ainmniú ar an ngaol atá aige le haidhmeanna forbartha teangeolaíochta nó cultúrtha atá ag grúpaí a bhaineann le forbairt na gceantar Gaeltachta, beidh ar staidéar dá leithéid a chruthú go mbedih dea-thionchar ag iarratas ar chothú agus úsáid na Gaeilge mar theanga an phobail. Ní thabharfaidh an tÚdarás Aitiúil tacaíocht d'fhorbairtí a mbeadh droch-thionchar acu.
RD Cuspóir 14	Soláthar chomharthaí as Gaeilge a chothú sna Gaeltachtaí maidir le: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Pointí iontrála agus fágála le sonraí mínithe do chuairteoirí ar thábhacht chultúrtha na gceantar, ii) Soláthar chomharthaíocht uilig tráchtála as Gaeilge, agus; iii) I gcomhair leis na grúpaí cuí proifisiúnta agus gairmiúla, go bhfuil comharthaí cheantálaithe agus comharthaí sealadacha eile as Gaeilge.

Critéirí Meastacháin Forbartha

Chun cuidiú le tionchar fhorbairtí nua tithíochta ar úsáid na Gaeilge sna Gaeltachtaí a mheas, cuirfear gach iarratas pleanála d'fhorbairtí tithíochta, idir fhorbairtí tithíochta singil agus iolracha, faoi bhráid na Roinne Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta agus faoi bhráid Bhainistíocht Údarás na Gaeltachta lena gcuid tuairimí a fháil agus cuirfear na tuairimí seo san áireamh agus léireofar na tuairimí seo nuair a dhéantar cinní maidir le gach ceann de na hiarratais pleanála seo.

6.7.6 Integrated Rural Tourism Complexes & Golf Courses

The location of the county in the hinterland of the largest metropolitan area in the state has generated considerable demand for golf course and leisure estate type developments with major complexes developed, under construction or permitted at locations such as Killeen Castle, Oldbridge Estate, Carton Demesne, Knightsbrook and Balrath House. The Development Plan acknowledges this regional amenity and tourism role for the county.

The provision of accommodation of an individual unit nature, either as self contained apartments or houses is acknowledged as being a component of such schemes. It is considered vital to the achievement of the broader settlement development objectives of this plan that the provision of such accommodation is linked to the leisure project through central ownership or management and that as a rule such accommodation does not become normal permanent places of residence.

It has been the practice of the Planning Authority over the past number of years to make exceptions to this policy, such as Killeen Castle, Headfort Demesne and Balrath House. In all cases, it has been the refurbishment and adaptation of a Protected Structure or group of structures within the attendant grounds into a modern day use thus ensuring their future survival that forms the basis for this exception. The heritage qualities of historic demesnes and the integrity of heritage buildings and their setting were protected in all cases. Similarly, Meath County Council's approach with respect to demesne estates which straddle county borders, will ensure that due regard is given to

the policies and established development permitted by our neighbouring authorities, e.g. Kildare County Council with respect to Carton.

The proposals to develop low density residential enclaves removed from urban centres for permanent accommodation is contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. Rural golf courses, hotels, race courses and other tourist developments located on green field sites, whilst providing an important regional amenity and tourism role, cannot be the basis for justifying residential development removed from supporting services.

GOAL

To promote, protect, improve, encourage and facilitate the development of Integrated Rural Tourism Complexes and Golf Courses in the County in a sustainable manner.

POLICIES

RD POL 34	To facilitate the creation of golf courses, pitch and putt courses and driving ranges in the countryside provided such development does not contravene any other policies or objectives of this Development Plan.
RD POL 35	To encourage resort type development of former demesnes and estates subject to good planning practice.
RD POL 36	To ensure that the provision of dwellings, which form part of a tourism related development and which will be occupied as permanent places of residence will only be considered favourably in the case of refurbishment and adaptation of a Protected Structure or group of structures within the attendant grounds into a modern day use.

Development Assessment Criteria

In assessing resort type development the Planning Authority shall have regard to:

- The integrity and essential characteristics of the visual qualities of rural landscapes are acknowledged and protected. (Refer to County Landscape Characterisation and Assessment);
- The heritage qualities of demesnes and the integrity of heritage buildings and their settings are protected;
- The need for public access is acknowledged and incorporated into the proposal;
- The need to ensure that such proposals will not impinge on any right of way or walking route;
- Proper traffic management measures are put in place where major events are anticipated, and;
- Other environmental concerns in relation to waste management are properly provided for.

6.7.7 Holiday Homes

With the exception of the coastal strip and to a lesser extent, the area surrounding Brú na Bóinne, the County is generally not under significant pressure from second home or holiday home development. This would be largely a result of the proximity of the County to Dublin and the

operation of strict controls with regard to building in the countryside. It is acknowledged that well located and appropriately scaled second home and holiday home development can act as a revitalising force, in economic terms, particularly in more remote / structurally weak areas. However, an unstructured approach to such development in some counties has led to concerns about the effects of such development on certain coastal and lakeside rural areas and on some small towns with relatively limited environmental capacity to accommodate very significant numbers of new (holiday) homes. Holiday home development can also have adverse effects on affordability for permanent rural dwellers.

It is the function of the Development Plan to strike an appropriate balance between demand where it arises and channelling such development to the locations that can best accommodate such development. In particular, this Development Plan makes reference to the National Spatial Strategy and the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines in relation to holiday homes under which Planning Authorities are encouraged to:

- Emphasise a preference towards the clustering of appropriately scaled holiday home development in or adjoining small towns and villages, and;
- Adopt a plan led approach in identifying the potential and preferred locations for appropriately scaled holiday home development in both rural villages and towns and the countryside in general.

The Landscape Characterisation and Assessment has identified certain sensitive scenic areas such as the coast, lakeside areas and uplands which are limited in their capacity to carry very substantial numbers of holiday homes and that such capacity as exists needs to be carefully managed.

GOAL

To harness the development potential and socio-economic benefits of the tourism sector, including that related to holiday home accommodation, whilst ensuring that such development does not prejudice the viability, environmental quality and character of the rural community and village network in the area.

POLICIES

RD POL 37	To encourage new holiday home developments to locate within either established villages or small towns and / or in distinct clusters in rural areas capable of absorbing such developments.
RD POL 38	To include proposals and objectives that strike an effective balance between conserving the character and scale of such urban centres and accommodating new development as part of particular Local Area Plans or Graig Design Statements.
RD POL 39	To look favourably upon proposals to reinstate, conserve and / or replace existing, ruinous or disused dwellings for holiday home purposes subject to normal planning considerations relating to design and provision of any necessary wastewater disposal facilities.

RD POL 40	To accommodate small scale enterprises, such as the renovation of barns, outhouses or other existing structures and the construction of one or two holiday homes for short term rental (less than 3 months at a time to any person / family) associated with an existing permanent residence or active farm / agri tourism enterprise. It shall be a condition of permission that such holiday homes be retained within the ownership of the complex / permanent dwelling and shall not be sold to form a separate permanent residence.
RD POL 41	To accommodate appropriately sited holiday home development as they arise, subject to normal planning considerations in relation to siting and design in Rural Area Type 3 'Low Development Pressure Area'.

6.7.8 Vernacular Rural Buildings and Replacement Dwellings

A key component of the rural landscape of Co. Meath is the built legacy of traditional dwellings and buildings, many of which have been neglected in preference for new dwellings, or because traditional buildings have become unsuitable as farming practices changed. In the majority of cases in recent times, modest vernacular 'Parnellite' cottages are being replaced with larger contemporary and in particular suburban style dwellings that in many instances, are out of keeping with the rural character of the area.

Policies

RD POL 42	To promote the viable re-use of vernacular dwellings without losing their character and to support applications for the sensitive restoration of disused vernacular or traditional dwellings.
RD POL 43	To encourage and facilitate the appropriate refurbishment of existing housing stock in rural areas and in certain limited cases the replacement of existing dwellings subject to development assessment criteria outlined below.
RD POL 44	To oppose the demolition and replacement of traditional or vernacular rural houses in order to protect the varied types of housing stock in rural areas of the County and to preserve the rural built heritage.
RD POL 45	To consider the limited conversion of outhouses and other structures attached to large country houses or other heritage structures where acceptable conservation practice is observed in line with the other policies and objectives of this plan and where acceptable site suitability has been established in terms of access, car parking, open space, wastewater disposal and maintaining the setting and amenities of the main structure.

RD POL 46	That in respect to the sensitive restoration and conversion to residential use of disused vernacular or traditional dwellings or traditional farm buildings, including those which are Protected Structures, such proposals shall not be subject to the Rural Housing Policy (i.e. local need) that applies to new dwellings.
RD POL 47	To actively promote the retention and restoration of thatched dwellings as a key component of the built heritage of Co. Meath.

Development Assessment Criteria

The Planning Authority shall assess applications for refurbishment and / or replacement of existing housing stock in rural areas, having regard to the criteria outlined hereunder:

- That in the case of refurbishment and extension proposals, that the scale and architectural treatment of proposed works are sympathetic to the character of the original structure and the surrounding area including adjoining or nearby development;
- That in the case of replacement dwellings, to require that the original structure was last used as a dwelling and that its roof, internal and external walls are generally intact;
- That replacement dwellings are provided at locations where safe access and acceptable wastewater disposal arrangements can be put in place and where specific development objectives or other policies of the Planning Authority are not compromised, and;
- That the size and scale of the replacement dwelling should be similar to the existing house and not more than 300 sq. m., except in the case where the original dwelling exceeds 300 sq. m., and;
- In the assessment of whether a house which is proposed to be replaced is habitable or not, the Planning Authority will rely on the definition contained in Section 2 (Interpretation) of the Planning & Development Act 2000.

A "Habitable House" means a house which

- (a) is used as a dwelling;
- (b) is not in use but when last used was used, disregarding any unauthorised use, as a dwelling and is not derelict, or;
- (c) was provided for use as a dwelling but has not been occupied.

6.7.9 Restricting Access to Certain Categories of Roads

National Primary and National Secondary Routes

National policy in relation to development involving access to national roads and development along such roads is set out in the NRA document "Policy Statement on Development Management and Access to National Roads" published in May 2006 which states that "as a general policy, the location of new means of access to the National Primary Roads, or residential, commercial, industrial or other development dependent on such means of access, should not be permitted except in areas where a speed limit of 50-60 km.p.h. applies, or in the case of infilling, in the existing built-up areas." The document points out that the same considerations also apply to national secondary roads.

Under Part 4, Article 28 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 - 2007, notification of planning applications which involve a new access or material widening of an access to an existing or planned national road, or where the development might give rise to a significant increase in the volume of traffic using a national road, must be sent to the National Roads Authority. The Authority may make submissions or observations on such planning applications in accordance with Article 29 of the Regulations. National policy in relation to access to national routes has been outlined previously in Section 4.5 and INF POL 29.

POLICIES

RD POL 48	To develop and maximise the opportunities of the county's national primary and secondary roads as key strategic infrastructure vital to the county's continued economic development and to protect this strategically important infrastructure from unplanned ribbon development or random one-off development.
RD POL 49	That direct access for future development shall not normally be permitted to any national primary and secondary road outside of the appropriate speed limit zones for towns and villages. Development Management policy should, in the first instance, seek to channel traffic from new development onto existing local roads and in this way use established access points to gain entry onto national roads. Where development is to be permitted off National Primary or Secondary Routes, this shall be in exceptional circumstances and shall in addition be in accordance with the development assessment criteria outlined.

Strategic Corridors

It is vitally important that new housing in rural areas that is located along non national routes is located in such a manner as to avoid endangering public safety by way of a traffic hazard. There are a number of regionally and locally important functions of certain regional and county road type routes that act as particularly important transport links that traverse Co. Meath.

POLICIES

RD POL 50	To ensure that all development accessing off the county's road network is at a location and carried out in a manner which would not endanger public safety by way of a traffic hazard.
RD POL 51	To identify and protect those non-national roads of regional or local importance from unnecessary and excessive individual access / egress points, which would prejudice the carrying capacity and ultimately the function of the road.
RD POL 52	In order to safeguard the specific functions and to avoid the premature obsolescence of identified regional and important county link roads (see Map No. 6.3) through the creation of excessive levels of individual entrances and to secure the investment in non-national roads, it is the policy to restrict new accesses for one-off dwellings where the 80km per hour speed limit currently applies.

Development Assessment Criteria

Exceptions to the above policies will be considered on their merits in the following circumstances:

- For those who have a location specific rural housing need based on substantive involvement in agriculture and cannot provide access onto a nearby county road and therefore need to access a National Primary, Secondary or Regional Road or identified important country road. In these circumstance, the applicant will be encouraged to maximise the potential of an existing entrance. The onus shall be on the applicant to demonstrate that they have no other access or suitable sites within their landholding;
- Where an existing dwelling with a vehicular entrance that is not considered to constitute a traffic hazard is to be demolished and replaced with a new dwelling, and;
- For those who have a location specific rural housing need on family owned lands and cannot provide access onto any other non identified, non national road not being of regional or local importance and therefore need to access one of the roads identified on Map No. 6.3. The onus shall be on the applicant to demonstrate that they have no other access or suitable site that can share an existing entrance within their landholding.

New development proposals onto certain regionally and locally important county road type routes that act as particularly important transport links that traverse Co. Meath shall be assessed having regard to:

- Avoiding unnecessary new accesses, for example where access could be provided off a nearby county road.
- Ensuring that necessary new entrances are located in such a manner as to provide effective visibility for both users of the entrance and users of the public roads so that opportunities for conflicting movements are avoided.
- Avoiding the premature obsolescence of regional roads in particular, through creating excessive levels of individual entrances.
- Securing recent investment in non-national roads such as the substantial strengthening and realignment programme underway under the National Development Plan 2007-2013 by minimising the provision of new entrances onto realigned stretches of regional roads in particular.

Roadside Boundaries

Roadside boundaries, whether hedgerows, sod and stone bank, stone wall or other boundaries, provide important features that are elements of both the landscape and ecology of rural areas. The retention of such boundary treatments assists in absorbing new rural housing into its surroundings and should generally be encouraged.

Occasionally, the removal of substantial lengths of roadside boundaries is proposed as part of an element of improving visibility at the junction of a new entrance onto a road. Where an alternative site is available and otherwise suitable, applicants and Planning Authority should consider a location that avoids the necessity for widespread boundary removal.

POLICY

RD POL 53

The removal of existing roadside boundaries, except to the extent that this is needed for a new entrance, should be avoided where at all possible except where required for traffic safety purposes. (Please refer to policies contained in Section 8.2.11 Hedgerows in this regard).

Roads Served by Unmanned Railway Crossings

Under the National Development Plan, a rail investment and safety programme has yielded substantial route renewal and service upgrades that will deliver, over time, more frequent and faster rail passenger services over the rail network. In some areas, laneways accessed via unmanned level crossings that were originally designed to provide access to agricultural lands are the subject of significant residential development. In certain circumstances, the provision of substantial additional development that is completely dependent for access using unmanned and unprotected level crossings may increase the risk of a rail / road safety incident unacceptably or to the degree that alternative crossing arrangements are necessary. The provision of such arrangements needs to be carefully considered given the likely costs involved and the availability of resources.

POLICY

RD POL 54

To refer proposals for new housing development requiring access via unmanned and unprotected level crossings to Iarnród Éireann and to carefully consider the subsequent views of Iarnród Éireann such that due and proper consideration has been given to the safety of road users and rail safety.

6.7.10 Technical Requirements**One Off Houses****Sight Distances and Stopping Sight Distances**

RD POL 55

In assessing individual planning applications for individual houses in the countryside, it is the policy of the Planning Authority to ensure that the required standards for sight distances and stopping sight distances are in compliance with current road geometry standards as outlined in the NRA document Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) specifically Sections TD 41/95 and TD 9/05.

Groundwater Protection and the Planning System

Ensuring that the country's water resources are of the highest quality is a prerequisite for a healthy environment, a healthy economy and is a key part of Government policy. The planning system at national, regional and local level has a key role in ensuring that development proceeds in a manner that ensures Ireland's water resources continue to be of the highest quality.

Circular Letter SP 5/03 issued on July 31st 2003 covers three main issues in relation to the role of the planning system in ensuring that development proceeds in a manner that offers the best possible environmental protection, including protection of groundwater quality. The three issues are:

- i) The need for more information within development plans on the location and potential vulnerability of groundwater resources and for clear policies on how development in different areas will be approached based on the available information.
- ii) The need within the development management system to ensure that effective regimes for the proper assessment of site conditions as well as the design, installation and maintenance of on-site wastewater treatment and disposal facilities are put in place.
- iii) The need for Planning Authorities to put in place appropriate monitoring and enforcement mechanisms that ensure that those who carry out approved development meet their obligations to adhere to the terms of planning permissions.

(1) Groundwater Protection and the Development Plan

The mandatory and discretionary objectives that a development plan may include, the measures needed to identify and conserve water quality generally and groundwater specifically to be put into effect.

Identifying groundwater resources and protecting them in a way that integrates environmental protection and the operation of the planning system requires that effective linkage be created between any groundwater protection scheme which has been put in place. This includes:

- Identifying key aquifers and groundwater resources, assessing their vulnerability to contamination, incorporating protection schemes for specific sources of public water supplies;
- The development plan made under the Planning and Development Act 2000, and;
- The operation of the development management system as it relates in particular to the assessment of proposals involving on-site disposal of wastewater, agri-wastes and any other development activity that potentially may affect groundwater quality.

Meath County Council have prepared groundwater protection schemes and it is imperative that these are linked in a variety of different ways to the new County Development Plan. As progress is made with putting these groundwater protection schemes in place, they will be coupled with appropriate policies in this Development Plan to facilitate groundwater protection.

POLICIES

RD POL 56	To ensure that new development meets the highest standards in terms of environmental protection.
RD POL 57	To incorporate a "Groundwater Protection Response Matrix" to assist in deciding the appropriateness of various categories of development to areas that have different levels of vulnerability in terms of groundwater contamination. This approach will support the proper input of information into planning decision-making processes.

By consulting this matrix, prospective applicants as well as the Planning Authority will be able to get an indication of the likelihood of a proposed development being acceptable on a given site, or whether further investigations or adjustments to the proposals are necessary. For the Planning Authority, this matrix will also be of assistance in determining the nature of any planning and monitoring conditions to be attached to planning permissions.

(2) Groundwater Quality and Decisions on Planning Applications

Under Section 34(2)(a) of the Act, when making its decision in relation to an application, Planning Authorities are restricted to considering the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, regard being had to the provisions of the development plan as well as other provisions. These other provisions include, where relevant, the policy of the Government, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, or any other Minister of the Government.

Good siting and design of necessary development in rural areas is vitally important. In this regard, the current standard for domestic effluent treatment and disposal from single dwelling houses is set out in Recommendation SR6 : 1991, which was drawn up by the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI). SR6 : 1991 includes more detailed requirements regarding site suitability assessments, minimum site sizes and means of ameliorating site problems.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a Manual on Treatment Systems for Single Houses (2000), which was designed to help Planning Authorities, developers and others to deal with the complexities of on-site systems, including newer packaged systems. As an alternative to recommending a minimum site size, the EPA Manual makes recommendations about matters such as separation distances from water courses and wells, site boundaries, etc.

The assessment of site conditions is critical to ensuring that new development does not adversely affect water quality generally and groundwater quality specifically. In particular, site assessors need specific training. A new training course provided by FAS: "Site Suitability Assessment for On – Site Wastewater Management" and which is run jointly by the GSI and EPA is strengthening the availability of personnel specifically trained to make detailed site assessments and recommendations regarding wastewater treatment and disposal options. The Planning Authority propose to use a standard site characterisation form along the lines of the model included at Appendix A in the EPA manual and insist upon the use of such qualified personnel in carrying out site assessments.

It is also very important that on site systems - both conventional septic tank systems and innovative effluent treatment systems - are installed in accordance with the manufacturers or supplier's specifications and instructions and the terms and conditions of planning permissions. Innovative effluent treatment systems should be certified by the NSAI Irish Agreement Board (IAB) or by the Agreement Board (or equivalent) of an EEA Member State, where the latter certificate ensures in use an equivalent level of safety and suitability. It is important that any installation instructions incorporated in the relevant Agreement Certificate (or equivalent) should also be strictly followed. The process of installation should proceed under the supervision of a competent person and be certified by that person. Evaluation of site suitability will be undermined if the system is not installed as designed. The Planning Authority will ensure that conditions attaching to a grant of permission provide for the above as well as a suitable means of confirming that the installation process has been adequately supervised by a competent person.

(3) Monitoring and Enforcement of Planning Requirements

The primary responsibility for ensuring compliance with the terms of a planning permission rests with the person carrying out the development pursuant to a planning permission. In the normal course of carrying out developments, there will also be parallel requirements to comply with other codes such as the national Building Regulations made under the Building Control Acts 1990 - 2007 or water pollution legislation, to mention two examples.

Progress in improving development plan policies, more comprehensive site assessment and installation supervision needs to be matched by a renewed vigour by the Planning Authority in monitoring the degree to which those carrying out approved development meet their obligations to comply with the terms of planning permissions granted, and in enforcing such terms where necessary.

The Planning Authority will endeavour to ensure that the process of enforcing the terms of planning permissions for all developments involving on site wastewater treatment and disposal, including septic tanks, is co-ordinated through a local authority held database linked to a Geographical Information System (GIS) which would provide information such as the location and types of such systems relative to vulnerable areas as well as details such as maintenance contracts. Such a database can then be used to structure an annual programme of testing and monitoring the performance of individual wastewater treatment and disposal systems. Such a database would also be of value in recording outputs from site assessments and providing inputs into new site assessments in terms of general drainage trends in an area.

Wastewater Disposal

Wastewater from residential development in unserved areas is normally dispersed underground. Individual wastewater treatment facilities in rural areas should therefore, be located, constructed and maintained to the highest standards to ensure minimal impacts on water quality and particularly groundwater quality.

POLICY

RD POL 58	To ensure that new development is guided towards sites where acceptable wastewater treatment and disposal facilities can be provided, avoiding sites where it is inherently difficult to provide and maintain such facilities – sites prone to extremely high water tables and flooding or where groundwater is particularly vulnerable to contamination.
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In order to ensure both public health and environmental protection, it is essential that any new dwelling is served by drainage arrangements that meet the Council's requirements and standards.

Where on site treatment plants are proposed, the following policies shall be adhered to:

POLICY

RD POL 59	The site area shall be large enough to adequately accommodate an on-site treatment plant and percolation area.
RD POL 60	A proprietary treatment plant and polishing filter / percolation area shall satisfy the criteria set out in the Wastewater Treatment Manual Treatment Systems for Single Houses, as amended, by the Environmental Protection Agency.

RD POL 61	The site characterisation form must be furnished by a suitably qualified competent person. Notwithstanding this, the Planning Authority may require additional tests to be carried out under its supervision.
RD POL 62	A maintenance agreement or other satisfactory management arrangements must be entered into by the applicant to inspect and service the system as required. A copy of this must be submitted to the Planning Authority.
RD POL 63	Pending the installation of the treatment plant and polishing filter / percolation area, the applicant will be required to lodge a deposit with the Planning Authority. The deposit shall be refunded on receipt of a certificate from a competent person confirming that all necessary works have been carried out in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
RD POL 64	The direct discharge of effluent from on site waste water disposal systems to surface water is not acceptable. Septic tanks shall be permitted only in exceptional circumstances, and shall comply with the requirements of the Environmental Health Officer and the standards set in SR6 of 1991, or as may be amended.