

# Social Strategy

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### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

A community's quality of life does not solely depend on housing, employment and infrastructure support, but also on access to social, community and cultural facilities that are fundamental to social cohesion, promoting a sense of community and personal enhancement. Community infrastructure is an umbrella term that is usually understood to include buildings and other facilities related to serving the needs of the public for social, cultural, health, educational, childcare, religious, recreational and leisure needs. The facilities and services are generally provided by public sector bodies or by the community themselves, but can also be provided by the private sector.

Community infrastructure may also encompass small retail outlets such as the local shop, pub or post office as these can also help maintain and nurture a sense of community at local level. These are traditionally considered only in the context of their retail and commercial function but their importance for the local economy and the creation of a sense of community cannot be underestimated, in particular in the more rural and isolated of centres.

### 7.2 STATUTORY CONTEXT

Section 10(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended sets out a list of mandatory objectives to be included in a development plan. A number of these objectives deal with social infrastructure, either directly or indirectly. They include:

- The zoning of lands for the use solely or primarily of particular areas for particular purposes (includes recreational and open space uses) where and to such an extent as the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, in the opinion of the Planning Authority, requires the uses to be indicated;
- The integration of the planning and sustainable development of the area with the social, community and cultural requirements of the area and its population;
- The preservation, improvement and extension of amenities and recreational amenities, and;
- The provision, or facilitation of the provision, of services for the community including, in particular, schools, crèches and other education and childcare facilities.

The First Schedule of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, lists purposes for which objectives may be included in development plans. Part III of the First Schedule deals with community facilities and includes the following objectives:

- Facilitating the provision and siting of services and facilities necessary for the community, including the following:
  - i) Hospitals and other healthcare facilities;
  - ii) Centres for the social, economic, recreational, cultural, environmental, or general development of the community;
  - iii) Facilities for the elderly and for persons with disabilities;
  - iv) Places of public worship and meeting halls;
  - v) Recreational facilities and open spaces, including caravan and camping parks, sports grounds and playgrounds;
  - vi) Shopping and banking facilities, and;
  - vii) Reserving land for burial grounds.

It should be noted that whilst the policy context for the achievement of the community infrastructure throughout the County will be contained in the County Development Plan, the specific objectives relating to the reservation of land for such purposes will be contained in the individual Local Area Plans or Graig Design Statements, as appropriate.

### 7.3 POLICY CONTEXT

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area (RPGs) emphasise the importance of developing strong, vibrant and sustainable communities. The overriding aim of the NSS is to promote a better spread of job opportunities, a better quality of life for all and better places to live in. The NSS indicates that:

*“the enhancement of quality of life, through integrating the provision of social infrastructure with policies that affect where people live and work, is dependent on the fact that different types of infrastructure are appropriate to different points within the urban and rural structure.”*

A certain critical mass is required to sustain specialist or higher functions such as hospitals or third level educational establishments. As a result, such functions tend to develop in the larger urban centres within a region. For smaller communities to function well, there is a need to sustain strong community infrastructure, such as a community centre / multi purpose hall, a primary school, post office, local shop or pub. Figure 3 overleaf, taken from the NSS, provides an indicative pattern of service provision that is likely to be appropriate at different levels of urban centres ranging from rural settlements such as graigs and villages to the city. The NSS emphasises the need to match the settlement size and the level of services that can be supported. Accessibility to a wider range of services can be secured through a good quality road network and / or public transport, information dissemination and the provision of appropriate outreach programmes.

The RPGs call upon Planning Authorities to adopt objectives that provide for the social, community and cultural needs of all persons and communities through the provision of well dispersed and easily accessible social and community infrastructure. Such objectives are seen as significant contributory factors in ensuring the delivery of a high quality of life.

### 7.4 COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE IN CO. MEATH

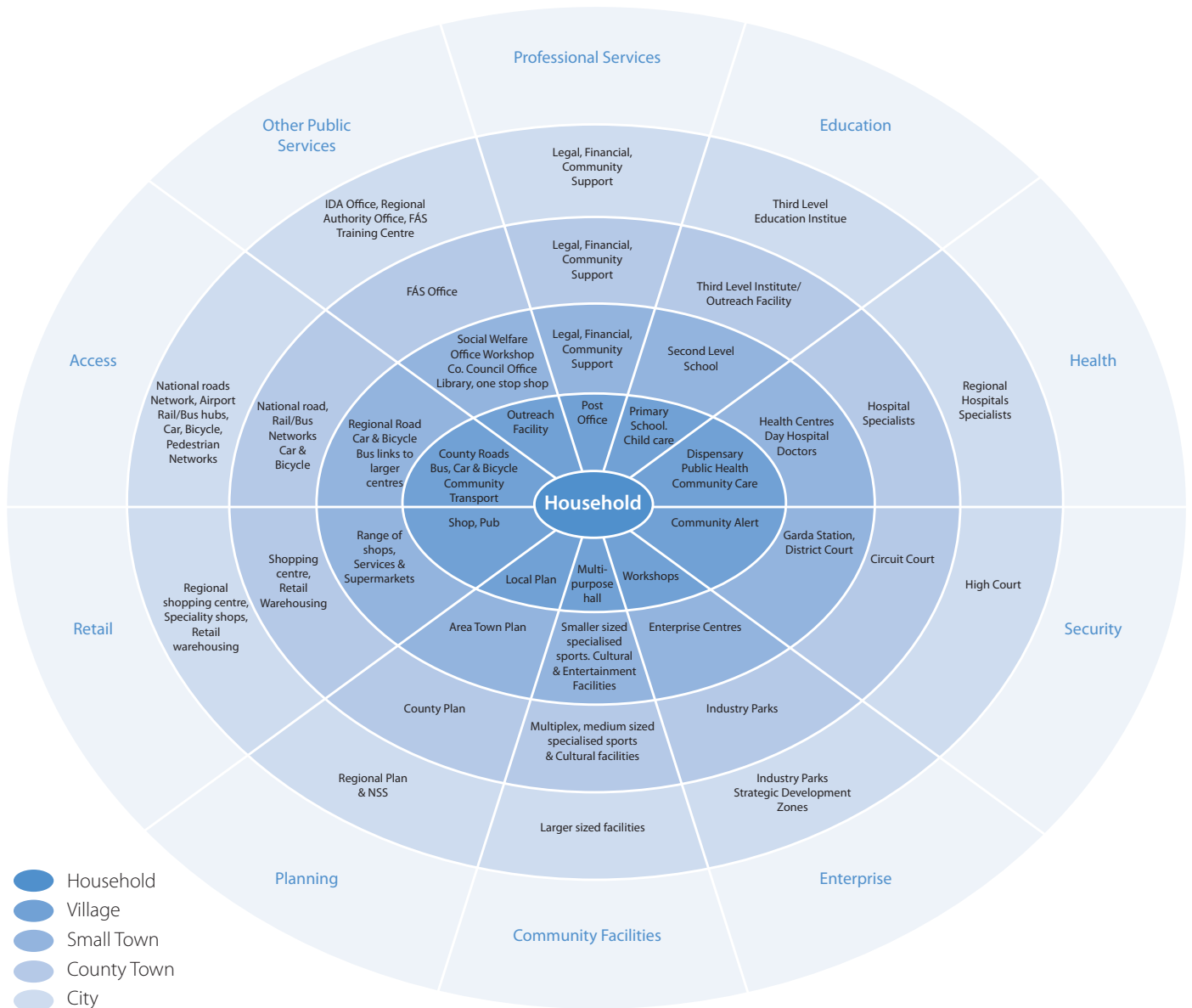
A strong social foundation exists in County Meath with its long standing history of community organisations. This is reflected in the presence of voluntary agencies and community initiatives that continue to play a central role in contributing to the delivery of a wide variety of local social services. A key component of the overall community facilities strategy is to encourage and assist in the formulation, development, guidance and co-ordination of community organisations, local interest and self-help groups. Co-operation between these groups and the Local Authority can ensure that better use can be made of existing facilities and resources to meet current and future needs.

The community sector is under considerable pressure as the level of resources and volunteering struggles to cater for the needs of an expanding population and where changing work patterns, longer working hours and the absence of social and community obligation does little to assist. Whilst County Meath continues to develop a stronger urban structure, there are still parts of the

county, principally in the north west, west and south west, that still have a primarily rural structure. The dispersed nature of the rural population limits the economic viability of providing public, social and cultural services.

Meath County Council is committed to strengthening the settlement structure and service integration across the County and aims to eliminate the gaps in facility and service provision where these exist. In this regard, an audit of sporting and community facilities in the county currently being carried out will identify gaps in the availability and usage of such facilities. The Development Contribution Scheme will be utilised to assist in meeting some of the needs in this area.

Figure 3: People and Social Infrastructure - Access to Services (Source - National Spatial Strategy) Social Inclusion



As different levels of service provision are appropriate to settlements of different sizes, it is therefore imperative that special care is taken with the siting of community facilities and careful consideration should be given to locating appropriate facilities and services within towns and villages as the need arises and which are accessible to all sectors of the community.

The primary role of the Planning Authority is to reserve sufficient lands within the settlement centres to meet likely future demands for community infrastructure. A recurring problem with respect to the provision of this infrastructure, in particular education and health facilities which are mainly provided by public bodies, is that the reservation of such sites by appropriate zoning is not in itself a guarantee of the timely provision of a necessary community facility. The Local Area Plans and Framework Plans will seek to resolve this current problem by linking the provision of community facilities to increases in residential population within large residential areas by means of phasing arrangements. The Planning Authority has an obligation under Section 15 (1) of the Planning & Development Act to "take such steps within its powers as may be necessary for securing the objectives of the development plan". This would include the appropriation of land by the Local Authority to make it available for a particular purpose or use.

The preferred option for the Planning Authority is for new and existing buildings to facilitate and provide for a range of compatible community uses. The Planning Authority will investigate opportunities for multi-purpose use to ensure that communities are best served without duplication of effort. It is important that the greatest possible use of a building is made, thereby providing community and leisure facilities close to the areas where they are needed.

#### GOAL

To provide for the future well being of the residents of the county by ensuring the provision of necessary services and facilities by means of consultation through available fora.

#### POLICIES

SOC POL 1	To support the provision and even distribution of a range of social infrastructure facilities to meet the needs of the County's population in liaison with other statutory, voluntary, and community groups.
SOC POL 2	To ensure that, where practicable, community, recreational and open space facilities are clustered, with the community facilities being located in local centres or combined with school facilities as appropriate. Community facilities should be located close to or within walking distance of housing, accessible to all sectors of the community and facilitate multi-use functions through their design and layout.
SOC POL 3	The Planning Authority will strive for meaningful consultation with community groups and youth agencies in the development of any significant public space that occurs within Large and Moderate Growth Towns and in particular in relation to the Local Authority's' own development.

SOC POL 4	The Planning Authority shall seek the efficient delivery of community and social facilities commensurate with the needs of the resultant resident population and that these facilities are developed contemporaneously with residential development. The preparation of Local Area Plans and Framework Plans assisted by the Residential Estate Guidelines (when prepared) shall provide for the delivery of such facilities.
SOC POL 5	To require as part of all new residential and commercial developments, and in existing developments where appropriate, provision to be made for facilities including local / neighbourhood shops, childcare facilities, schools and recreational facilities, and to seek their provision concurrent with development.
SOC POL 6	To implement the Development Contribution Scheme, which will form a basis for the improvement of existing community facilities and the funding of new community facilities.

The Planning and Development Act 2000 requires development plans to include objectives for the integration of the planning and sustainable development with the social, community and cultural requirements of the area and its population. Building strong, inclusive communities is an integral component in achieving such sustainable development objectives. In addition to economic development, sustainable communities require the provision of and access to education, health and community support services, amenities and leisure facilities and a good quality built environment. Communities also require opportunities to meet, interact and form bonds, all essential prerequisites to the development of a place and a sense of belonging.

Social exclusion has multiple aspects and is the end product of processes and a combination of deprivations that undermine the well being of individuals, families, social groups and communities. Social exclusion is defined by the Combat Poverty Agency as:

*"The process whereby certain groups are pushed to the margins of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, low education or inadequate lifeskills. This distances them from job, income and education opportunities as well as social and community networks. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and little chance of influencing decisions or policies that affect them, and little chance of bettering their standard of living."*

In all communities, despite the provision of social infrastructural services, certain groups and individuals tend to remain isolated and face barriers in accessing the same opportunities as others. These groups and individuals require specific policies that assist in overcoming these barriers and enable them to have the same quality of life as the rest of the community. The groups identified as being 'at risk of' poverty or social exclusion includes:

- Children;
- Lone parent households;
- Older people;
- Women;
- Carers;

- Unemployed and older men;
- People with disabilities;
- People with mental health illnesses;
- Migrant workers;
- Travellers;
- Asylum seekers and refugees;
- The 'working poor' (i.e. minimum wage households);
- Households without access to a motor car, and;
- The homeless or those at risk of homelessness.

An adverse effect of a growing economy is an increase in social inequalities and social polarisation. The benefits of economic prosperity over the past decade have not been shared equally, and this has resulted in increasing, rather than decreasing, inconsistencies in quality of life. Social exclusion is not particularly confined to one particular area or sector though it may be more pronounced in certain areas or sectors than others. Even within Co. Meath, there exist examples of inequalities in wealth and quality of life, in towns and villages, in rural communities and among particular social groups. Barriers to accessing the workforce such as lack of adequate and affordable childcare and access to education and training opportunities continue to affect certain groups and areas with pockets of persistent unemployment remaining. Access to services remains difficult for some, particularly those with disabilities or those living in isolated rural areas without adequate public transport services or access to a private car.

The rapid influx of new residents to towns and villages across the county into small, established communities has resulted in certain tensions starting to develop. The majority of the new residents are from Dublin, who continue to commute to work and to socialise in Dublin, spending most of each week outside of their new community. Opportunities for interaction between new residents and established members of the community can often be few and far between with the results that social bonds and the sense of community take longer to develop. The long term impact of this can be isolation for the new residents from the community and consequently from the structures and institutions which provide services to that community.

The Development Plan with its range of strategies to create a better physical environment and to promote access to housing, community facilities, public transport, etc., has an important role in reducing social exclusion in the county. The section on Community Facilities has included policies that seek to ensure that the social, community and cultural needs of all persons and communities be catered for through the provision of well dispersed and easily accessible social and community infrastructure contributing to and ensuring the delivery of a high quality of life. The Housing Strategy has included policies to ensure the integration of socially disadvantaged communities, including the Travelling Community, with the wider community by measures such as requiring a given proportion of housing to be dedicated for their needs. The benefits of achieving a greater balance of social mix are now well recognised. It will be important to ensure that the creation of areas of social disadvantage are avoided in the future, particularly with regard to the location and scale of social housing development.

All people should have the right to fulfil their potential, through access to high quality public services, education, and employment opportunities, adequate housing and an attractive and safe environment. It is, therefore, important that our living, working and leisure environments are designed and maintained in a manner that is accessible to all.

**GOAL**

Meath County Council is committed to developing a society based on equality, inclusion and participation for all, with each individual having a right to live their life in a pleasant, safe environment with access to necessary services and facilities to fulfil their aspirations and potentials.

**7.4.1 Meath County Development Board**

The role of the Meath County Development Board is to co-ordinate the delivery of services provided by a large number of statutory, private, community and voluntary agencies with responsibility for supporting economic, social and cultural development. It also has a key role in the facilitation of the integration of local government and local development. Section 3.1.3, Economic Development Strategy dealt with certain elements of this Strategy.

Meath County Development Board (CDB) launched its ten-year integrated strategy for the county "*Le Chéile - An Integrated Strategy for Meath to 2012*" in January 2002. This comprehensive strategy was based on extensive consultation and research, at local, regional and national level.

*Le Chéile* is based on an agreed CDB mission:

*"To promote the sustainable development of County Meath through an integrated and socially inclusive approach that recognises the economic, social and cultural potential of the population, and the limits and opportunities provided by the county's environmental and other resources"*.

The *Le Chéile* strategy has six objectives:

- 1) Secure sustainable economic and employment growth leading to improved living standards in County Meath;
- 2) Improve the international competitiveness of businesses in Meath and the capacity to attract inward investment;
- 3) Promote more balanced development throughout Meath;
- 4) Promote social inclusion in all parts of the county;
- 5) Improve quality of life for all sections of society in Meath, and;
- 6) Maintain and enhance the quality and diversity of the natural and cultural heritage.

*Le Chéile* is underpinned by a spatial framework established in the County Development Plan, in the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area and in the National Development Plan.

*Le Chéile* examined the impacts of population growth as perceived by the service providers. With regard to social issues, they included:

- Lack of social amenities contributing to spiralling crime especially in rapidly developing areas;
- Rise in demand for bus services in centres such as Dunboyne & Clonee;
- Transport services for people with disabilities are problematic, under funded & non-existent in places;





- Lower population densities in the north of County affects type of recreational facilities that can be developed;
- North west Meath requires special attention;
- Increase in number of dependent older people & people with disabilities;
- Greater demands on resources both financial & human;
- Greater demand on services but limited budgets to deliver (ADM group);
- Increase in number of women seeking support (refuge centre), and;
- Need for focussed anti-poverty work.

Based on the six core objectives and spatial framework, *Le Chéile* sets out 184 main actions to be implemented over the 2002-2012 period. These are organised under four sectors, following broadly the sectors in the National Development Plan 2000-2006:

1. Economic, social and cultural infrastructure;
2. Productive sectors;
3. Education, training and human resources, and;
4. Social, cultural and environmental facilities and services.

The 3 year review of *Le Chéile* has been undertaken based on an update of the socio-economic profile of the county, in particular based on data emerging from Census 2002 (analysis carried out by NIRSA) and an Activity Report for the CDB for 2002-2004. The Activity Report goes through progress made in relation to all 184 actions set out in *Le Chéile*. The Office of Community and Enterprise in Meath County Council has played a facilitative role over this period in establishing structures to allow for greater integration in the delivery of local services.

These structures include:

- County and Area Community Fora;
- Community and Voluntary Steering Group;
- The Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) Group ;
- Meath County Childcare Committee;
- Meath Local Sports Partnership, and;
- Meath Education Forum

The review of *Le Chéile* highlighted that whilst the social indicator trends which the 2002 Census revealed had already been identified in advance of the Strategy, the updated 2005 Socio-Economic Profile published by Meath CDB has reinforced the urgency of implementing *Le Chéile* due to the worsening of some of the trends. Meath is a county in transition changing from being a predominantly rural county to an urban county. The changes, to some extent, are creating a county of 'two halves' (south/east and north/west) - each with contrasting trends and facing distinct issues.

The review culminated in the preparation of the Action Plan for the second three-year period of the County Development Board Strategy. The 2005 - 2008 Action Plan selected a limited number of key priorities and actions on which the CDB will concentrate over the following three years. The emphasis in choosing the priority actions was to choose actions that link closely to the core remit of the CDB. The next planned review of the County Development Board Strategy will result in the production of an Action Plan to cover the period 2009-2012.

#### 7.4.2 Social Area Analysis carried out by NIRSA

The promotion of a more inclusive society is a key objective of all development strategies for the future. It is a core objective in the National Development Plan 2007-2013. While there is broad agreement on the objective, there are difficulties when it comes to measuring the extent of social exclusion. Due to the very significant data limitations, it is necessary to rely on a number of proxy variables to identify the distribution of groups that may be at risk of experiencing some form of social exclusion. It is important to note that not all persons described by a particular proxy variable may be experiencing exclusion.

Meath compares favourably with the rest of the state in relation to a series of different social indicators. Slightly smaller proportions of Meath people fall within the lone parent family and educational disadvantage categories. The unemployment rate and the proportions living in rented local authority housing are also somewhat lower in Meath. The lower levels in these categories are reflected by differences in the Haase-Pratschke absolute and relative affluence / deprivation scores for Meath and the State average. Meath scores higher in terms of both absolute and relative affluence than most other counties in the State. The estimates of change in the relative affluence / deprivation scores also show that Meath experienced a greater increase in affluence levels than the rest of the State over the 1996-2002 period.

At Electoral District (ED) level the lowest levels of relative affluence within Meath, as based on the Haase-Pratschke Index, are associated with the more northern and western parts of the county, as well as with the town centres of major urban centres, such as Trim, Navan and Kells. EDs that were characterized as disadvantaged, based on this index were: Kilmainham (-7.8), Cloghbrack (-7.6), Duleek (-7.12) and Slane (-7.1). The highest levels of affluence were found in the southeast, with smaller clusters in the Drogheda environs and the rural environs of Trim. The EDs with the highest levels of relative affluence, based on this index, were Kilcooly (19.3), Ratoath (17.4), Dunshaughlin (16.8), Rodanstown (16.1), Kilbrew (15.5) and Dunboyne (15.2). Kilcooly (+ 28.9) experienced the most significant increase in its relative affluence score over the 1991-2002 period, followed by Castlejordan (27.8), Castlerickard (27.2), Castletown (25.9), Ballyboggan (25.8), Moylagh (25.6) and Ardnamullan (25.0). Killallon (3.0), Killeagh (7.5) and Stonefield (9.6) experienced the smallest increases in terms of their relative affluence scores.

The NIRSA analysis concluded in the presentation of a social area typology based upon 5 factors - socio economic status, level of urbanism, family status, demographic change and labour market status. Despite the complex socio economic and demographic diversity, it is possible to summarise the socio demographic geography of the county in which areas differ from each other. Clusters of districts also emerge from the analysis.

##### Cluster 1: Old Urban Cores

There are 3 electoral divisions in this cluster, which relate to some of the largest urban centres in the county, namely the town centres of Trim and Navan, as well as the Laytown-Bettystown area. This cluster is particularly characterised as having above average levels of people in the 65 and over age category, single persons, lone parent households, and people living in either flats or apartments. There are also relatively high levels of non national citizens, of female labour force participation, of no-car households, as well as high levels of commuters who are spending 90 minutes or more on their daily journey to and from work.

#### **Cluster 2: Commuter-Belt and Peri-Urban Areas**

13 EDs are included in this cluster and these tend to be found within the main commuter belt areas in the east and south-east of the county and the environs of the larger towns of Navan, Trim, Laytown and Drogheda. The area surrounding and including Enfield is also included in this cluster. This cluster is almost the mirror image of Cluster 1, in that the districts tend to be characterised by considerably lower than average levels of different social deprivation related variables. This cluster is characterised by above average levels of married people & levels of young adults (25-44). This cluster is characterised by the highest mean population densities, as well as by far the greatest rate of population growth. This suggests that areas in this cluster act as attractive residential locations for the rapid inflow of migrants into the county.

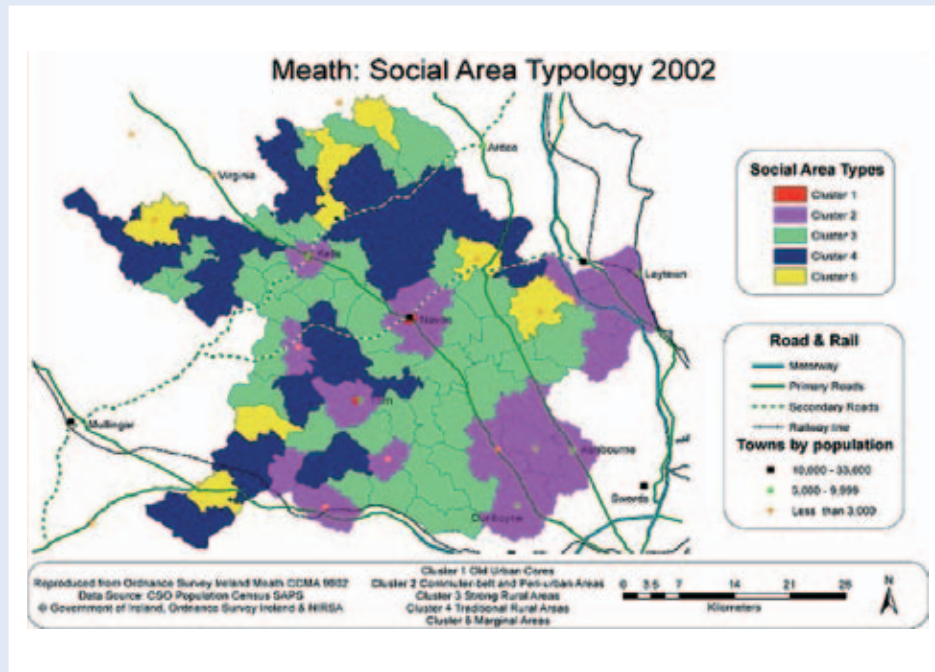
#### **Cluster 3: Strong Rural Areas**

Clusters 3 and 4 are by far the largest groupings, both in terms of the area covered and also in terms of the number of electoral divisions. The Strong Rural Areas Cluster contains the largest number of electoral divisions of all the clusters, containing 36 EDs in all (40%), which are particularly focussed on mainly rural areas in southern and central parts of the county. The demography is interesting with high levels in the 15-24 and 45-64 age categories, while lower than average levels of people in the 25-44 age cohort. The cluster, on the other hand, is associated with lower than average levels of flats or apartments, of new housing, and of rented Local Authority housing, thus underpinning the mainly rural characteristics of this area, as does the higher than average levels of agricultural employment. Of all the clusters, Cluster 3 appears to be the one to have been the least impacted upon by the rate of population growth over the 1996-2002 period, though there are variations between EDs.

#### **Cluster 4: Traditional Rural Areas**

This cluster contains 31 EDs, covering much of the north-western and western parts of the county, as well as the south-western corner. The cluster is associated with relatively high levels of residential stability, as is evidenced in a relatively lower rate of population growth than other parts of the county, the high level of non-mortgaged owner occupied housing, above average percentages of family households, and high rates of agricultural employment. The mean voter turnout levels within this cluster are also well above the county average. On the other hand, the electoral divisions in this cluster 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.

Figure 4: Social Area Typology 2002



#### Cluster 5: Marginal Areas

There are a relatively small number of districts within Cluster 5, nine in all, which are spatially dispersed across different parts of Co. Meath. The common denominator of these EDs is their high levels for various social deprivation related factors. This cluster is associated with a particularly high mean unemployment rate of 10.1%, with high average levels for the percentage of people living in rented Local Authority housing, persons with low educational attainment levels, and in the semi-skilled and unskilled social class groups. High levels of lone parent households and of lone parent families with no children are also associated with the electoral divisions in this cluster. High percentages of the households within these clusters are also without cars, as well as being without personal computers or access to the Internet. The electoral divisions within this cluster are also characterised by above average rates of population growth. On the other hand, these areas have lower than average levels of non-Irish and non-UK nationals and of part-time workers, as well as low levels of people in the managerial, technical and professional social class groups. The electoral divisions in this cluster are Kells Urban, Newtown, Duleek, Slane, Oldcastle, Ardnamullan, Athboy, Cloghbrack and Killaconnigan.

#### Conclusions

This analysis suggests that it is possible to identify a small number of distinctive clusters, on the basis of similar socio-economic and demographic characteristics, even in a county such as Meath that has relatively low levels of social class stratification. It points to significant differences between the clusters, such as differences in terms of relative affluence between Cluster 5 and Clusters 1 and 2, and differences in terms of population growth between Cluster 2 and Clusters 4 and 5. The culmination of this analysis is to present a division of the county into five relatively distinct social areas, each of which have relatively similar socio-economic and demographic characteristics, and each cluster has its own problems and challenges which will require different policy interventions

and responses. For Cluster 5, the focus is on social well-being and the challenge is to invigorate the economic and employment growth of the relatively underdeveloped areas within this cluster in advance of the changes to these areas that may arise in future years arising from increased levels of residential development. Cluster 2, by contrast, faces fewer difficulties in relation to labour force participation and social well-being concerns, but instead its concerns are with responding to the rapid population growth experienced by districts within the cluster over recent years. The main concerns here are quality of life issues arising from inadequate service provision and commuting difficulties. Urban problems are what largely define the challenges faced by the urban-core areas within Cluster 1, as well as issues to be faced in terms of the growing needs of ageing populations. For Cluster 4, the problems relate to agricultural decline, peripheral location and low levels of access to services such as the provision of internet access. As the rate of decline in agricultural employment continues, Cluster 4 will likewise need to address such issues, especially within the context of its low rates of population growth. This cluster, to some degree, acts as a transition territory between the districts experiencing rapid economic and population growth in Cluster 2 and the relatively underdeveloped areas located in Cluster 5. The future development of the county may dictate whether this cluster emerges as identifying more and more with the underdeveloped rural areas to the north and the west, or the rapidly growing commuter-belt areas to the south and east.

These differences between the different parts of the county, and the underlying forces of change, need to be reflected in future development strategies.

#### 7.4.3 Groups with Specific Design / Planning Needs

There are several groups considered to have specific planning and design needs. These include children / young people, people with a disability or illness, lone parent young families, older people, travellers and members of ethnic minority groups.

#### STRATEGIC POLICY

##### SOC STRAT SP 1

To recognise the need for people with special needs to enjoy a decent living environment in the County, and to support the local communities, the health authorities and other bodies involved in the provision of facilities for people with special needs.

#### 7.4.4 Young People and Children

The 2002 Census indicated that Meath had approximately 39% of its population aged less than 25 years compared with 37.5% in the State. These factors have a bearing on the needs, both present and in the future, for facilities such as childcare, play areas for children, sports facilities, school safe walking and cycling routes and activities / facilities for teenagers such as youth cafes and clubs.



#### 7.4.5 Mothers / Child Carers

The role of women as carers in society means that they are more likely to experience physical barriers to access and movement, e.g. with young children in buggies. Level access to buildings, dished kerbs, parent and child parking facilities and baby changing and feeding facilities are important

considerations for this grouping. Access to services such as childcare, community facilities and public transport are also essential. Women are also less likely to frequent environments that are perceived as unsafe, e.g. unlit lanes or open spaces that are informally supervised. Good design is a prerequisite in creating a more accessible environment which promotes personal safety.

#### 7.4.6 Older People

People aged 65 or over and living alone account for a relatively lower proportion of the Meath population than for the State, as is also the case with the group aged 75 or over and living alone. Of those aged 65 or over and living alone, 67.4% were females. While there is a small cluster in the extreme south-west, most of the electoral districts with relatively high percentages aged 65 and over are in the north and north-west along the borders with Cavan, Monaghan and Westmeath. Each local community must plan to provide a range of supports and services to enable its older people to maintain the optimum level of health, dignity and independence. Whilst not having direct responsibility for providing such services, Meath County Council, as the local Planning Authority has responsibility for regulating the development and use of land in the public interest to meet the requirements for development. The rural transport initiative is an important factor for this group to ensure accessibility to health services, shops and social outlets. Good design is also imperative in creating a safe and barrier-free environment which is easily accessible and manageable by older people.

#### 7.4.7 Persons with a Disability

In 2002, there were 8,989 persons resident in Meath who were classified as having a disability amounting to 6.7% of the population. The majority (40.5%) were aged over 65 years, while 6.8% were under 15 years. The distribution of persons with a disability shows high incidences in the north and also parts of the southwest.

People with disabilities face particular physical barriers to access and movement. For people with mobility impairments, ensuring level / ramped access to buildings, dished kerbs and provision of appropriate parking and toilet facilities are important. For people with visual impairments, tactile paving and audible signals at pedestrian crossings are necessary.

The Barcelona Declaration aims to encourage local government to make provision for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the community. The Declaration contains agreed actions to be undertaken by Local Authorities in pursuit of barrier-free design in all environments.

Access requirements for people with a disability must be incorporated into the design of shops and all other buildings, public spaces, facilities and services likely to be used by the general public. All new build shall comply with the Building Regulations and the guidelines Building for Everyone published by the National Disability Authority. In the regard, the Meath Access Committee has been re-established in line with the recommendation of the Social, Community & Cultural Strategic Policy Committee of Meath County Council.

Meath County Council is committed to supporting the National Disability Strategy. All efforts will be made to ensure that access and other needs for disabled people will be considered in all aspects of planning and implementation under this County Development Plan. Meath County Council commit to ensuring that no action under this plan will create barriers for disabled people and all reasonable efforts will be made to remove such barriers where the creation of such barriers was the responsibility of the Council. Meath County Council are committed to promote and pursue best practice in relation to design for all within all areas of Meath County Council's responsibility.

The Council is committed to the principle of Care in the Community. This means that where possible, individuals who are able to manage in their own homes with appropriate support or in adapted accommodation will be encouraged to live in their community. The Council will encourage the provision of day care centres in central places such as towns, villages and neighbourhood centres that are easily accessible by pedestrians and public and private forms of transport.

The Council is also committed to the provision of sheltered housing schemes which allow residents to continue to live with dignity and as independently as possible while providing the security, care and supportive services necessary. Sheltered housing units should be located within built up areas close to shops and other community facilities required by the occupants, and should be easily accessible to visitors, staff and servicing traffic.

#### 7.4.8 Travellers

Travellers are a group that has traditionally felt excluded from many aspects of society. The Census of Travellers (2004) showed that there were 185 traveller families in Meath. Of these families, 129 were living in houses including 69 in standard Local Authority estates and 41 in Traveller Group Housing Schemes in Navan and Trim. Another 42 families were accommodated on halting sites. The main concentrations of families are around Navan and Trim with some families also in Ratoath, Bellewstown, Dunshaughlin, Dunboyne and Kells.

The Traveller Accommodation Programme for 2005-2008 was adopted by the County Council in February 2005 and it makes provision for delivering 55 housing units. The Traveller Accommodation Programme addresses particular accommodation needs of Travellers.

Navan Traveller Workshops Ltd. is a voluntary community development organisation, which works as a partnership of Travellers and settled people working to improve and enhance the social and economic situation of the Travelling Community in Co Meath. It provides a number of childcare services and employment support programmes. The Council will continue to co-operate with the Navan Traveller Workshops Ltd. and other appropriate groups to investigate the particular needs of the Travellers Community.

There is a process presently underway to adopt an inter-agency strategy for the delivery of services and supports to the Traveller Community and the County Development Plan will support any actions or core objectives that will emanate from this process.

#### 7.4.9 Ethnic Minorities

The most recent group of residents in the county that are susceptible to various forms of exclusion are refugees, asylum applicants and economic migrants, with many nationalities now residing in Co. Meath. For those seeking refugee status, uncertainties concerning asylum applications lead to considerable difficulties with regard to accommodation, education and lack of opportunity to participate in the labour force. Many economic migrants also experience difficulties with regard to housing, tenure of employment and social integration. In planning for these communities, cultural sensitivity will be required.

#### 7.4.10 Community Participation

The community and voluntary sector has always played a considerable role in Irish society. In recent years the value of this role has been recognised and the availability of funding and support has seen numerous community development initiatives being established, ranging from the European-wide LEADER programmes to local authority funded estate management initiatives.

The community and voluntary sector in Co. Meath is well established with over 800 groups who participate in the Community Fora facilitated by the Office of Community & Enterprise involved across a range of areas including health, environment, education, sports and recreation, arts, music, community development and residents associations.

Meath County Council is dedicated to promoting local public participation in all issues that affect their area. It recognises that active community participation is crucial to building an empowered community. The Local Authority is committed to creating partnerships with local community groups and relevant agencies as a basis for the formulation of Local Area Plans or Framework Plans, which reflect the real needs of the community. Meath County Council is devoted to maintaining good working relationships with voluntary groups and organisations within the county, and supporting efforts by communities to provide and improve facilities and amenities in their local areas.

Meath County Council operates an annual "Pride of Place" Initiative whose aim is to work in partnership with communities to encourage best practice, innovation and leadership in providing vibrant sustainable communities that improve the quality of life for all through environmental improvements to towns and villages.

#### 7.4.11 Areas of Disadvantage

Analysis undertaken on Census 2002 by NIRSA shows that Meath compares favourably with the rest of the state in relation to a series of different social indicators. Levels of deprivation and poverty tend to be higher in the north and west of the county, as well as the town centres of Navan, Trim and Kells, although pockets of deprivation exist in all parts of Meath.

#### 7.4.12 RAPID and CLÁR Programmes

RAPID Programme (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) Investment comes under the remit of the National Development Plan. The RAPID programme was launched in Navan in August 2002 with the aim of promoting community participation, service integration and investment to the RAPID estates of Navan. The work is facilitated and monitored by the Navan RAPID Area Implementation Team. The Navan RAPID Area Plan was published in 2003.

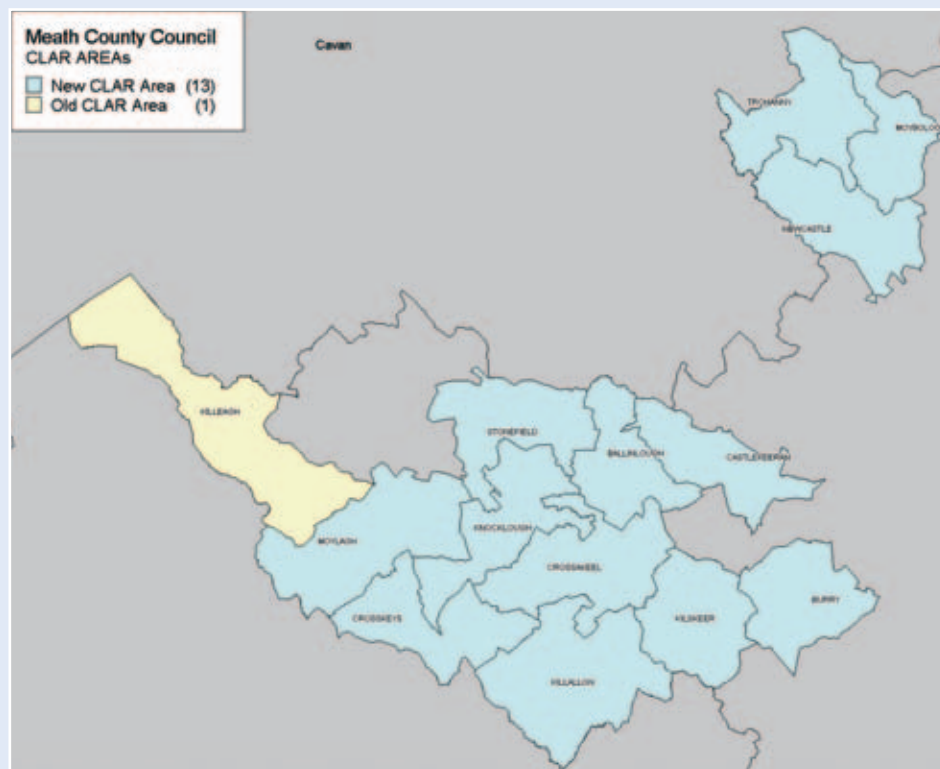
The programme is operated locally by an Area Implementation Team, facilitated by a local co-ordinator and consisting of a diverse range of participants (representatives from state agencies, local partners, community, county council and town council) working together to improve local people's lives, as well as co-ordinating the provision of resources in an area.

CLÁR (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) is an investment programme for disadvantaged rural areas and is overseen by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Killeagh, located in north-west Meath bordering Westmeath and Cavan was the one ED in Co Meath involved in the original CLÁR programme. This ED was selected because it suffered a population decrease between 1926 to 2002. Additional EDs have recently been added to the CLÁR Programme as shown on Figure 5 overleaf.



CLÁR provides funding and co-funding to Government Departments, State Agencies and Local Authorities in accelerating investment in selected priority developments. These measures support physical, economic and social infrastructure across a variety of measures, e.g. roads, water & sewerage, enhancement, community and sport initiatives, electricity, health and telecommunications. The measures reflect the priorities identified by the communities in the selected areas following consultation with the Department.

Figure 5: CLÁR (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) Areas in Co. Meath



#### POLICIES

SOC POL 7	To promote a more inclusive society by being aware of social exclusion, poverty and deprivation and to include those who are socially disadvantaged and marginalised in decision making.
SOC POL 8	To promote more inclusive and integrated communities through the planning system.
SOC POL 9	To continue to co-operate with statutory bodies, in particular the County Development Board, and other agencies including the voluntary sector, resident, business and environment groups to counter disadvantage and social exclusion, to secure improvements in the quality of life and to promote equality of access to public and social services for all members of the community.

SOC POL 10	To promote local self-sufficiency, including the public participation in developing the Local Agenda 21 process and to encourage the provision, through local enterprise, of appropriate community and recreational facilities.
SOC POL 11	To continue to support the concept of integrated service delivery with other state agencies as promoted by the Meath County Development Board.
SOC POL 12	To continue to assist Meath County Development Board in the implementation of the 'Le Chéile' Integrated Strategy for Social, Economic and Cultural Development.
SOC POL 13	To promote the retention of existing services, particularly in disadvantaged areas, and seek the provision of neighbourhood facilities concurrent with new development.
SOC POL 14	To encourage and promote the renewal of disadvantaged areas, with specific reference to the principle of targeting investment in disadvantaged areas through the implementation of commitments outlined in the RAPID programme for Navan, the CLAR programme for the north west Meath Electoral Divisions, and the utilisation of the Council's Development Contributions Scheme to form a basis for the improvement of existing community and recreational facilities and the funding of new facilities in disadvantaged areas. In this regard, to also promote of the County wide Local Development Social Inclusion Programme and the National Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, both delivered through Meath Partnership.
SOC POL 15	To promote participation and empowerment for all through an inclusive approach to service provision in line with Equality Legislation and the Barcelona Declaration of 1995 and the National Disability Strategy.
SOC POL 16	To promote universal equality of access to public spaces and buildings through good design leading to a safe and barrier free environment.
SOC POL 17	To implement the provisions of the Council's Housing Strategy including the requirement for Traveller Accommodation and Social and Affordable Housing.

## OBJECTIVES

SOC OBJ 1	To create poverty profiles of areas other than those benefiting from the RAPID & CLÁR programmes which have significant concentrations of disadvantaged people and to recommend methods of small scale urban regeneration which might attract investment and development leading to employment opportunities.
SOC OBJ 2	To develop and promote the undertaking of consultation and community participation mechanisms in the preparation of statutory and non statutory land use plans and other studies identified in the County Development Plan.

SOC OBJ 3	To assist in the provision of community and resource centres and youth clubs / cafes and other facilities for younger people by the identification and reservation of suitably located sites, including sites within the landbanks of the Local Authorities, by assisting in the provision of finance for their development through the provisions of the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended, and by the use of Local and Action Area Plans / Framework Plans to ensure provision is made for such facilities as the Council consider appropriate, in consultation with relevant local interested parties.
SOC OBJ 4	To secure the implementation of the Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme 2005 – 2008.
SOC OBJ 5	To prepare and implement a revised Traveller Accommodation Programme in 2008.
SOC OBJ 6	To continue to implement and enforce the Building Regulations, 1997 - 2006 and to ensure that developments meet the requirements of the guidelines Building for Everyone, published by the National Disability Authority, 2002.
SOC OBJ 7	To ensure that all relevant development proposals incorporate access and facilities for people with special mobility needs such as level access to buildings, dished kerbs, appropriate parking spaces and accessible toilet facilities.

## 7.5 EDUCATION FACILITIES

Schools traditionally have an important role to play in developing sustainable and balanced communities and encouraging families to participate in activities within the County. School facilities along with other community facilities are fundamental to the well being of a thriving community and help to maintain and nurture a sense of community at both local and countywide level. Educational centres have a valued role in developing a skilled workforce and educated population in the interests of maintaining the economic and social vitality of the county. Central to Ireland's success as an economy was the economic importance of education and this has encouraged and continues to maintain an increased output of high quality graduates in the labour force and the development of a high-income society over the last decade.

*"Le Chéile – An Integrated Strategy for Meath to 2012"* prepared by the Meath County Development Board stressed that

*"Education and training are fundamentally important to achieving the full potential of the people of Meath, the County's most important resource."*

The changes in demographic trends that have occurred in the recent past and are projected to continue during the initial years of this Development Plan, have far reaching effects for Meath. Such trends are as a direct result of the dominance of market-led growth in terms of pace and location. The volume, speed and nature of this population explosion is more severe in Co. Meath than for most

counties even when compared to most of those within the Greater Dublin Area. The make up of this growth is underpinned by the influx of foreign nationals and migrants from neighbouring counties, most notably Dublin. The CSO projections indicate that the current patterns of migration are set to continue. Due to the growing percentage of those in the 0-14 age group, County Meath has a high dependent cohort. This has implications in terms of social infrastructure provision in the county, particularly with regard to childcare facilities and primary school provision. This population growth has put significant pressure on existing educational facilities to cater for the increased population.



The Department of Education and Science Commission on School Accommodation has published "Area Development Plan for the N4/M4 2004-2010." This is the first such area development plan to be prepared by the Department. It deals with the educational needs of this corridor up to 2010 and includes the urban centres of Longwood, Enfield and Kilcock environs located within County Meath. A draft Area Development Plan for East Meath and South Louth has also been prepared. Meath County Council welcomes the proactive approach of the Department. Through the Local Area Plan process, the Planning Authority will ensure that the recommendations of this and subsequent Educational Area Development Plans are included as local objectives.

In addition to catering for those within the 0-14 age cohort, the Planning Authority must recognise the need and benefits of providing access to education for all its residents. Life long learning will increasingly become a feature of an individual's life. This will have direct implications for the use and demands placed upon educational facilities and the need to improve access to such facilities by socially deprived sections of the community.

These factors, outlined above, have affected and impacted upon the composition of education and training in the County. It is imperative that County Meath adapts to and changes to meet the growing demands of its population if it is to remain progressive.

The "Meath Strategy for Higher Education – A New Approach" (2002) outlined an opportunity to develop a special education brand for County Meath based on the concept of the "Learning County" – instigating a unique approach reflecting a higher education ethos and value system which would set Meath apart from other counties offering third level programmes. The "Meath Education and Training Audit" (December 2005) prepared for the Meath Education and Training Forum, stressed not only the need to implement the strategy, but that its objectives be expanded to include the development and promotion of lifelong learning across all sectors within education and training.

#### 7.5.1 Meath Education and Training Audit 2005

As outlined above, the Meath Education and Training Forum, a sub committee of the Meath County Development Board undertook an Education and Training Audit of Co Meath in response to the recommendation of the County Development Board Strategy – Le Chéile. The findings were published in December 2005. The document recommends the establishment of the County Education Forum to prepare an integrated County Strategy for education and training encompassing all levels from pre school to adult learning and training. The principal findings relating to primary and post primary schools, third level education and, adult and further education are presented below. The findings in relation to early childhood care and education are presented in Section 7.6.

### 7.5.2 Primary and Post Primary Sectors

In the primary sector, Meath has the highest concentration of primary schools and the highest number of primary school students in the north-east area of the country. Many of the smaller schools are located in rural areas to the north and west of the county. The total number of students attending Meath primary schools in 2003 / 04 was 17,432, comprising of 9,038 males and 8,394 females.

Of the 108 primary schools in the county (2004 / 05), the following results were recorded:

- 30% of these schools are located in Navan EA facilitating 30% of primary level students in Meath;
- 20% of these schools are located in Trim EA facilitating 17% of primary level students;
- 20% of these schools are located in Dunshaughlin EA facilitating 28% of primary level students;
- 9% of these schools are located in Slane EA facilitating 11% of primary level students, and;
- 21% of these schools are located in Kells EA facilitating 14% of primary level students.

In 2004 / 05, there were 17 post-primary schools in Meath, which facilitated 9,247 pupils. A new post primary school became operational in Ratoath in September 2005. It would not appear that Drogheda Grammar School or Gormonston College were included in this survey by the Meath Educational and Training Forum.

Of the 17 post-primary schools in Meath;

- 34% of students attend schools in the Dunshaughlin EA;
- 27% of students attend schools in Navan EA;
- 25% of students attend schools in Kells EA, and;
- 14% of students attend schools in Trim EA.

Substantial changes have taken place in primary and post primary schools over the past decade as a direct result of the volume, speed and nature of the growth in the school going population. The large primary schools in urban areas have adapted faster to this demographic change than the smaller, more traditional schools located in rural areas. The perceived failure to adequately provide for primary school needs within the rapidly expanding residential areas of the County has been highlighted as a major concern. This relates to the necessary provision of additional new schools and buildings but also the expansion and upgrading of many of the existing schools in the county. The audit states that

*“the issues of adequate school accommodation, lack of space and the improvement of buildings needed to be addressed in order to achieve a quality educational package.”*

The implications of these trends continuing include the loss of play areas for temporary classrooms, the increase of the pupil / teacher ratio, infrastructural difficulties such as traffic congestion and health and safety considerations.

### 7.5.3 Third Level Education

The education audit found that 65% of students from Meath who are enrolled in third level courses attend educational institutions in Dublin. This is explained by the close geographical positioning of the two counties and the wide range of courses and institutions available in the Dublin Area. One of the most prevalent issues cited by stakeholders in the surveys carried out related to the extent of students who leave the county to attend third level education and who fail to return to the county after completing their education.

With no Third Level institute established in Co. Meath, all agencies with facilities for training and adult learning should co-operate more closely and access national and international funding to provide a variety of accredited courses. Current shortfalls include the lack of a broader strategy for Higher Education and Training Awards Council courses and more certified courses in partnership with Third Level Institutions.

### 7.5.4 Adult & Further Education

The audit concluded that significant gaps exist in the area of Adult & Further Education. Despite the development of limited third level certified courses, there is no Higher Education and Training Awards Council provision and inadequate Further Education and Training Awards Council provision in the county. Many adults are currently travelling to Dublin, Drogheda, Dundalk, Maynooth and Cavan to access even the most basic of courses.

It is necessary to develop a co-ordinated strategy for Adult & Further Education to increase service provision across the County. Obstacles to be overcome include increasing the availability of childcare provision, more transport provision for people with disabilities / geographical isolation, the provision of a pre-study group facility and a dedicated adult guidance service in the County. There is limited high skill / knowledge based industry present in the County which provides few opportunities for qualified employees / graduates to return to work in the County. This is currently being addressed through measures identified in the Economic Development Strategy of this plan. The development of formalised links with enterprise and industry through graduate placement programmes and investment in research should be continued and encouraged further.

### 7.5.5 Role of the Planning Authority

The Planning Authority has no direct responsibility for the provision of education. Decisions on the future requirements for educational facilities are primarily a matter for the educational authorities. The primary role of the Planning Authority is to reserve sufficient lands within the identified development centres to meet likely future demands for community facilities including education. The RPGs recommend that:

*“the provision of primary and secondary education facilities should be planned and implemented in concert with the planning and development of residential areas in order to maximise the opportunities for use of walking, cycling and use of public transport.”*

In urban centres across the county, there has been significant residential development without the accompanying first and second level educational facilities. This has placed considerable strain on existing facilities in those areas. Future provision should be planned and implemented in concert with residential development, especially where this is undertaken in the context of Local Area Plans

and Framework Plans. Where such provision is being planned, it should be located, if possible, to utilise counter-flows on the public transport network, to maximise the use of walking, cycling and public transport and / or to reinforce the proposed 'development centres' in the County.

The 2001 - 2007 County Development Plan reserved adequate land for educational facilities throughout each of the urban centres for which written statements and detailed objectives were produced. An emerging problem for educational and other community facilities as outlined in the introduction to this section of the Development Plan is that the reservation of such sites by appropriate zoning is not in itself a guarantee of the timely provision of a necessary community facility. The Planning Authority will continue to liaise with and advise the Department of Education and Science and with Meath VEC of the likely population projections for the centres for which Local Area Plans will be prepared for. The Planning Authority will also liaise with the providers of education, both denominational and non-denominational to assist where possible in the development of adequate education centres.

Where new schools are required, they should be located close to, or within the main residential areas of the town so that as many children / students as possible can walk or cycle to school. The opportunity should be taken to locate the schools so that they naturally contribute to the development of a sense of community in new neighbourhoods. Where possible, these schools should be served by a dedicated and safe footpath and cycle-way network.

#### 7.5.6 Dual Use of School Buildings

School and other educational premises represent a valuable resource in terms of land and buildings, which generally are only used on a partial basis. The dual use of educational facilities, where it does not conflict with the delivery of the education service (i.e. outside school hours and during school holidays) can contribute to meeting the wider needs of the community, by helping to satisfy demand for a variety of activities. The DoEHLG Guidelines on Childcare Facilities recommend the use of school premises to cater for after school care and school authorities are encouraged to examine how they can help address this demand.

Where lands and buildings can be beneficially used by the community, the Council will promote such uses subject to available resources. Where new schools are proposed and indeed other community facilities, opportunities will be sought to ensure that they are designed in such a way as to facilitate dual use from the onset.

#### POLICIES

SOC POL 18	To facilitate the development of primary, post primary, third level, outreach, special needs, research, adult and further educational facilities to meet the needs of the county.
SOC POL 19	To ensure the provision of primary and secondary education facilities in concert with the planning and development of residential areas in order to maximise the opportunities for walking, cycling and use of public transport.

SOC POL 20	To ensure that adequate lands are zoned and reserved to cater for the establishment, improvement or expansion of primary and post-primary educational facilities in the County. The Council support the concept of multi-campus educational facilities.
SOC POL 21	To co-operate with the County Development Board in the preparation of an integrated county strategy for education and training provision.
SOC POL 22	To encourage, support and develop opportunities to open up new and existing schools to wider community use.

## OBJECTIVES

SOC OBJ 8	To facilitate the Department of Education & Science in the necessary provision of primary and post primary educational facilities throughout the County by reserving lands for such uses in the respective Local Area Plans.
SOC OBJ 9	To facilitate the development of post primary and Post Leaving Certificate educational facilities in the County by reserving adequate lands in the relevant Local Area Plan for the establishment of the requisite facilities in Dunboyne, Clonee, Longwood, Enfield & Drogheda Environs.

## 7.6 CHILDCARE FACILITIES

The provision of childcare facilities is recognised as key component of social infrastructure required to enable people to participate in accessing employment, education and social networks. With profound demographic and social changes occurring in Co Meath, childcare is a prevalent issue for many families.

As outlined in the introduction to this section, the Development Plan must contain objectives relating to the provision, or facilitation of the provision, of services for the community including crèches and childcare facilities. Government policy seeks to increase the number of childcare places and facilities available and to improve the quality of childcare services for the community. To assist Planning Authorities to this effect, the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government's produced "Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities" (2001) which sets out guidance on policies and objectives to be included in development plans.

The "Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities" identify appropriate locations for childcare facilities including in the vicinity of concentrations of work places, of schools, of neighbourhood, district and town centres and adjacent to public transport corridors, park-and-ride facilities, pedestrian routes and dedicated cycle ways. Childcare is defined in the guidelines as "full day-care and sessional facilities and services for pre-school and school going children out of school hours". It includes services involving care, education and socialisation opportunities for children. Consequently services such as pre-schools, day-care services, crèches, playgroups and after school groups are included within this category.



County Childcare Committees have been developed to advance childcare at local level. The role and function of the committees is to develop and implement a six-year strategic plan that will support the development of existing and new services. The Meath County Childcare Committee (M.C.C.C.) have developed their strategy "Meath County Childcare Plan 2002-2006" to ensure the balanced provision of a range of accessible, affordable and quality childcare facilities throughout the county which assist the overall developmental needs of children, ranging in age from 0-14 years. The Childcare Plan deals with private owner operated facilities and community childcare services which are run on a non-profit basis and are managed by a voluntary committee of parents and members of the local community. The implementation of this plan has seen just over €9 million invested in Co. Meath. The results of this investment provided under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) has seen the number of childcare facilities more than double from 1999. This has resulted in the creation of 981 additional childcare places throughout the County. The EOCP ended in December 2006 and has been replaced by the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) which will run until 2010. The NCIP aims to support families to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage and to support a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of childcare, centred on the needs of children.

Research undertaken by the M.C.C.C. in late 2004 has found that there are a number of barriers which are preventing people obtaining the most desired childcare. The most frequently cited barrier was the actual availability of the provision, namely that the provision sought is simply not offered in the local area. Cost was also considered a major obstacle to accessing childcare even if it were available within the local area. Transportation and the location of the provision were not considered significant barriers by most parents surveyed. The survey concluded that parents in Meath are willing to travel to access affordable childcare once it comes available.

From the Childcare Services Providers Census carried out by the MCCC, there were 119 childcare facilities operating in Co. Meath, 95 of which offered sessional care and 24 offered full-day care (crèches). 2,370 children aged between 0-12 years in the county attended these childcare facilities. From a geographical viewpoint, the majority of places were located in the Dunshaughlin Area with 40% of all places (over 900 places) and in the Navan Electoral Areas comprising 24.5% of all places (579 places). The Kells Electoral Area had 16% of childcare places (384 places) with a much smaller percentage recorded in the Trim Electoral Area with 10.5% of childcare places (251 places) and with the Slane Electoral Areas comprising 9% of places (234 places) respectively. The lack of existing facilities is an important consideration in the assessment of planning applications for additional childcare facilities in the latter Electoral Areas.

There were 740 full-time places for children who do not attend school within the county, with 23 premises facilitating these places across the county. The majority of these facilities are located in the Dunshaughlin Electoral Area where 8 premises cater for 340 full-time childcare places, which is nearly 50% of the total places available countywide. There was also a total of 188 full time places and 93 part time places within services for school going children, which caters for the summer and other school holidays.

There were 1,943 pre-school places in the county facilitated through 111 premises within the five electoral areas. The majority were located within the Dunshaughlin Electoral Area with 38 premises, which facilitated 36% of the places in Meath. 29 premises in Navan provided nearly 500 places in pre-school facilities.

The field research revealed that approximately 14% of pre-schools were attached to primary schools. The fostering of this resource and increasing the development of pre-school attachment to primary schools should be actively supported.

There is a recognised shortage of full day care facilities throughout the County. Meath County Council acknowledges the importance of an adequate level of childcare provision, in terms of equality, assisting in alleviating poverty and social exclusion and in helping to ensure the availability of an adequate labour force. Meath County Council granted planning permission for 43 childcare facilities in 2003 creating a potential 1,634 childcare places and 26 childcare facilities in 2004 creating a potential 858 places. The majority of these facilities were granted planning permission as part of an integrated residential development. There would appear to be a time lapse between planning permission having been granted and the building / operation of the facilities. Meath County Council is positive and proactive in encouraging an increase in the number of childcare places available and thereby improving the quality of childcare services for the community.

The Council will consider the 'Meath County Childcare Plan 2002 - 2006' or any subsequent plan in the future provision of childcare facilities in the County and also have regard to the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government's Planning Guidelines on Childcare Facilities (2001). Guidelines on the provision of childcare facilities in residential developments are set out in Chapter 10 of this Development Plan.

#### POLICIES

SOC POL 23

To encourage, promote and facilitate the provision of childcare facilities in accordance with national policy and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government "Childcare Facilities - Guidelines for Planning Authorities".

SOC POL 24

To ensure the provision of quality affordable childcare throughout the County in consultation with the Meath County Childcare Committee in the implementation of the Meath County Childcare Committee Plan 2006 – 2010 and subsequent plans, the County Development Board and the Health Services Executive, North East.

SOC POL 25

To require the provision of childcare facilities of an appropriate type and scale in suitable locations throughout the County. In particular, the development of childcare facilities at the following locations will normally be required:

- Areas of concentrated employment and business parks;
- Neighbourhood centres;
- Large retail developments and retail warehouse parks;
- In schools or major educational facilities;
- Adjacent to public transport nodes, and;
- Within new and existing residential development.

**SOC POL 26** To encourage the provision of childcare facilities in tandem with proposals for new residential developments. Generally, one childcare facility with places for 20 children shall be provided for every 75 dwellings. The Planning Authority will encourage developers of new residential developments to consult with the Meath County Childcare Committee on how best to meet the childcare needs of that area.

**SOC POL 27** To permit childcare facilities in existing residential areas provided that they do not have a significant impact on the character or amenities of an area, particularly with regard to car parking, traffic generation and noise disturbance. Where proposed facilities relate to properties which have been designed and built as dwellings, and are surrounded by other houses, a significant residential element should be retained.

**SOC POL 28** To promote and encourage the provision of a network of childcare facilities that reflect the distribution of the residential population in the county and to minimise travel distance and maximise opportunities for disadvantaged communities.

## 7.7 HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

Healthcare and medical facilities are provided by public, private and voluntary agencies within Co. Meath. The Health Service Executive – North Eastern Area (previously North Eastern Health Board) is the primary organisation responsible for the delivery of health care and personal social services to the people of Meath. Our Lady's Hospital in Navan is an acute hospital for the north-east region whilst St. Joseph's Hospital in Trim is a district facility. The residents of the county also have access to hospitals in the surrounding counties – Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, the Midland Regional Hospital in Mullingar, Cavan General Hospital, and the numerous hospitals in Dublin. With the scale of increase in population, it is to be expected that there will be a demand for more healthcare and medical facilities within the county to cater for the resident population. Future funding of health care facilities is a direct function of Central Government.



The Department of Health and Children published "The Primary Care - A New Direction" in 2001 and this promotes a team-based approach to service provision, designed to make available a fully integrated primary care service. Consequently, practices wishing to develop their premises are encouraged to provide a "one stop" primary health and community care service integrated into one building. Healthcare facilities may include health centres, day centres, community nursing units, family resource centres, nursing homes / convalescent homes, community residences, sheltered workshops, activation centres and residential facilities for children and adolescents. These facilities require locations which are integrated with new and existing communities and which are easily accessible.

There is a move towards more community care based health services and the Health Service Executive operate a number of community care health centres in the following settlements of Co. Meath;

- Athboy
- Ashbourne
- Ballivor
- Ballyboggan
- Castletown
- Drumconrath
- Dunboyne
- Duleek
- Dunshaughlin
- Enfield
- Kells
- Laytown
- Navan (2 centres, one attached to Our Lady's Hospital and one in Johnstown)
- Nobber
- Oldcastle
- Slane
- Summerhill
- Trim
- Wilkinstown

The primary role of the Planning Authority with regard to health care is to ensure that there is an adequate policy framework in place inclusive of the reservation of lands should additional services be required and that the health care facilities would be permitted subject to good planning practice. Future provision should be planned and implemented in concert with residential development, especially where this is undertaken in the context of Local Area Plans and Framework Plans. The Planning Authority will reserve sites within development centres for health care facilities in consultation with the HSE NE.

Many factors such as environmental, educational, economic and social status also influence the health status of a population. The Planning Authority has a role to ensure that the natural environment such as air, water and soil quality is protected. A good quality built environment is also important factor with the design of buildings, sufficient open space, playgrounds, pedestrian and cycle ways among others assisting in achieving the overall goal of promoting a healthy lifestyle.

In the event that major hospital facilities are proposed to cater for increased population levels or where it is proposed to re-locate major hospital facilities to a new location during the life of the County Development Plan, particular regard will be had to public transport access to such facilities. This should include both public transport access from the catchment area of the hospital and, where the facility serves a specialist or national need, from outside of the catchment.

#### POLICIES

SOC POL 29

To co-operate with the Health Service Executive (North East) and other statutory and voluntary agencies in the provision of appropriate health care facilities covering the full spectrum of such care from hospitals to the provision of community based care facilities subject to proper planning considerations and the principles of sustainable development.

SOC POL 30

To ensure that adequate lands and services are available for the improvement, establishment and expansion of health services.

SOC POL 31	To encourage the integration of healthcare facilities within new and existing communities and to discourage proposals that would cause unnecessary isolation or other access difficulties, particularly for the disabled, the elderly and children.
SOC POL 32	To consider change of use applications from residential to health care facilities / surgeries only where the privacy and amenity of adjacent occupiers can be preserved and the proposal does not have a detrimental effect on local amenity by way of an increase in traffic, car parking or noise. The full conversion of semi-detached or terraced type dwellings will not be permitted.
SOC POL 33	To encourage nursing homes and sheltered housing accommodation, where possible to be located within settlements to provide for easy access both for staff and visitors in order to enhance overall quality of life, and increase their links with, and accessibility to, local amenities. Where site selection takes these requirements into account, rural locations may be suitable in this regard.
SOC POL 34	To encourage, support and facilitate the provision of a range of services for the aged population. The Council is committed to accommodating the needs of older people in rural areas by the provision, or facilitation of nursing homes and sheltered housing developments. These facilities should be located within settlements in order to enhance overall quality of life, increase their links with, and accessibility to, local amenities, and therefore reduce the likelihood of social isolation.
SOC POL 35	To have particular regard to public transport access in considering proposals for major hospital facilities or the re-location of major hospital facilities to a new location. This should include both public transport access from the catchment area of the hospital and, where the facility serves a specialist or national need, from outside of the catchment.

#### OBJECTIVES

SOC OBJ 10	To facilitate the Health Service Executive North East in the provision of health centres at identified locations throughout the County by reserving lands for such uses in the respective Local Area Plans.
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## 7.8 SPORTING AND LEISURE FACILITIES / RECREATION

### 7.8.1 Introduction

Sporting, leisure and recreational facilities are essential to social cohesion, promoting a sense of community and can enhance a person's quality of life. One of the effects of the dramatic increase in population levels and significant housing demand and supply which has occurred in Meath in recent years is that a growing emphasis is being placed on the requirement for quality designed open space and recreational opportunities for residents, especially those living in urban areas.



There are generally two categories of open space provision, namely public and private open space. Public open space is a critical element to the creation of a quality and distinctive urban environment, offering opportunities for both passive and active recreation, contributing to the quality of life of residents and visitors alike and offering environmental and ecological benefits. Private open space provision is a fundamental tenet of residential amenity, offering the resident an opportunity for safe and private recreation. Private open space and open space provided within residential development will be dealt with separately in the next section.

Public open space has an important function and serves a variety of purposes set out below:

- Active recreation, such as football pitches, tennis courts, athletics, etc.;
- Passive recreation, such as walking, cycling, strolling, picnic areas, etc.;
- Visual break within the built up urban environment;
- Environmental function, being the lungs of our urban areas, and;
- Ecological function, through the provision and maintenance of wildlife habitats, and connectivity between habitats.

The provision of facilities for sports and recreation has become an increasingly important planning issue in recent years. Increasing prosperity together with lifestyle and health considerations contribute significantly to increases in demand for all kinds of formal and informal recreation facilities. Demand for housing supply has resulted in a growing emphasis being placed on the requirement for quality designed open space and recreational opportunities for residents, especially those living in urban areas. Thus, the appropriate provision of these facilities is a key issue for development plans.

### 7.8.2 Policy Context

The importance of the provision of quality open space is stressed in the Regional Planning Guidelines. In particular, it calls upon Planning Authorities in the preparation of Development Plans to:

- Ensure that the future provision of residential developments, or mixed use schemes with a residential element, should be consistent with the policies and recommendations of the Residential Density Guidelines for Planning Authorities with regard to the quantity and quality of public and private open space provision;
- Have a presumption in favour of the retention of existing sports and recreation facilities;
- Have proposals for the enhancement of such facilities and the provision of new facilities in all major residential developments, and;
- Identify areas within urban centres, particularly those selected for future development in the settlement strategy, for the provision of public open spaces for informal recreation.

The Regional Planning Guidelines also envisage that the creation of recreational opportunities and the provision of open space in rural areas will contribute to the rural economy and importantly, further contribute to the social and community infrastructure in rural towns and villages thus enhancing the quality of life of the residents and of other rural dwellers. To this effect, Planning Authorities should:

- Examine ways to improve access to the countryside for informal recreational purposes such as walking, cycling and horse riding;

- Where appropriate, in association with relevant Government Departments, ensure the provision of an adequate range of both outdoor and indoor recreational facilities in centres to cater for expected population demand;
- Locate areas of open spaces, recreation and sports facilities, especially such facilities in urban locations, within easy access by walking and cycling, and;
- Locate larger facilities likely to attract significant numbers of people and to be intensive trip generators, on routes well served by public transport.

A Policy for the Provision and Maintenance of Parks, Open Spaces and Outdoor Areas by Local Authorities was published by the then Department of Environment in 1987 and this sets out national policy. Although not obligatory, this recommends the following open space standard for urban areas:

- Local park of 2 ha (min) open space for 1,000 population, and;
- Neighbourhood park of 16 ha and two local parks per 10,000 population.

The National Play Policy is a document setting out requirements to provide and responsibility for the delivery of children's play facilities. The actions relevant to Local Authorities include the development of a play policy, the participation of children in decision making relevant to them, the use of creative landscape for play and the standards and maintenance of playgrounds.

The Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has established a Comhairle na Tuaithe to address three priority issues:

- Access to the countryside;
- The development of a Countryside Code, and;
- The development of a National Countryside Recreation Strategy.

In the interim, pending finalisation of this strategy, the working definition of countryside is accepted as that outlined hereunder:

*"Countryside recreation applies to those sporting, recreational and holiday pursuits based on use of the resources of the countryside and which contribute to healthy active lifestyles. The term countryside includes land, water and air. The term recreation in this context applies to sporting and recreational activities, which operate in the countryside as defined above. It does not refer to sporting activities, which take place in the countryside on confined courses or pitches specifically designed and constructed for those sports e.g. golf, football, show jumping, etc."*

The Action Plan for the Meath County Development Board (as part of the overall CDB Strategy – Le Chéile : An Integrated Strategy for Meath to 2012) includes an action to develop and implement a play strategy for Meath by 2008. The preparation of this co-ordinated multi agency County Play Plan would be led by the Community & Enterprise Department of Meath County Council. It would involve the carrying out of an assessment, to include disability access, of play facilities in each Electoral Area identifying the level, range and standard of public and community play facilities available to children of all ages. It would also identify the range of actions necessary to support the play activities of children from marginalised groups within the County.

### 7.8.3 Existing Sport and Leisure Infrastructure in Co Meath

Quality of life issues are to the fore throughout the county due to the pace of residential development experienced in Meath since the adoption of the 2001 - 2007 County Development Plan. The delivery of essential community facilities to serve the rapidly expanding population has struggled to keep pace with residential development. Indeed the lack of adequate sporting facilities was a major issue raised in the preparation and adoption of the East Meath Local Area Plans in particular.



There is a long lineage of sport in Co. Meath, ranging from the proud gaelic football tradition resulting in seven All Ireland senior football titles to horse racing at Fairyhouse, Navan, Bellewstown and Laytown. The presence of equestrian and related activities along with golfing facilities also has an increasingly important role to play in the tourism economy. Co. Meath possesses many fine watercourses and water bodies throughout its area and many are rich in term of the angling potential that they possess. Angling plays an important role in the passive recreation offer of the county.

The Socio-Economic Profile of Co. Meath states that information on recreation and leisure facilities is limited due to the absence of a comprehensive database. This however is being addressed by "An Audit of Sporting and Community Facilities in Co. Meath" which has recently been prepared by Meath Local Sports Partnership. The audit lists facilities that are specifically sports related and includes other facilities such as parish halls and community centres.

Almost every village has facilities for some organised field based sports. In addition there are 16 equestrian facilities and 11 golf courses within the county. There are also a number of walking routes such as the Boyne towpath and for swimmers, there are extensive beaches at Bettystown-Laytown. There are public swimming pools at Navan, Trim and Kells. Some of these facilities are located outside of zoned settlements, which adheres to the principle of a green belt as set out by both the NSS & RPGs.

While adequate lands were zoned in the 2001 - 2007 County Development Plan to provide for recreation, leisure and sporting activities, many of these facilities have to date failed to materialise. This will be addressed in the Local Area Plans by the utilisation of local objectives linked, where possible, to the phasing of residential development. In addition, efficient and effective use of the statutory Development Contribution Scheme should also assist in this regard.

The overall settlement strategy pursued in this Development Plan is based upon a hierarchy of settlements ranging from large growth towns to graigs. A hierarchy of community, sporting and leisure facilities commensurate with the resident population will be pursued accordingly. It is imperative that development provides for, and if necessary, leverages the necessary sports and recreation facilities which are accessible to all sectors of the community. These are critical to the achievement of balanced sustainable development. This will provide an invaluable resource in the preparation of the Local Areas Plans and will identify any deficit in sports facilities, playing fields and informal amenity open space within the individual centres. Specific objectives will be contained in the LAPs where the provision of such facilities is to be directly linked to the development of certain areas and to remedy any deficiencies identified in the audit of Sporting & Community Facilities.



## POLICIES

SOC POL 36	To develop a balance in the location and types of open space provided throughout the County and to ensure the development of high quality open space areas, for both active and passive use, and formal and informal activities.
SOC POL 37	To encourage and support local sports and community groups in the provision and development of outdoor and indoor sporting and community facilities.
SOC POL 38	To support local sports groups and community groups in the development of facilities through the reservation of suitable land and the provision of funding where available and appropriate.
SOC POL 39	To cater for the sporting and recreational needs of all sectors and ages of the community and promote the integration of those with special needs into the sporting and recreational environment.
SOC POL 40	To protect leisure and recreation facilities from change of use or redevelopment to other uses unless an alternative open space or leisure facilities can be provided to serve the same area.
SOC POL 41	To seek opportunities to improve the quality and capacity of existing leisure facilities and where appropriate, the Council will use its powers under the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended, to require development levies to achieve the enhancement of existing facilities.
SOC POL 42	To ensure that all new leisure facilities where possible are located along public transportation routes and where they can best meet the needs of the community that the facility is intended to serve.
SOC POL 43	In the case of large residential developments, to require developers to make appropriate provision for sports and recreation infrastructure commensurate with the needs of the development as an integral element of their proposals. Such provision should include direct provision on or off site or the payment of a development levy to enable appropriate alternative provision to be made.
SOC POL 44	<p>It is the Policy of the Planning Authority to not normally permit development proposals for sports involving the use of motor vehicles, aircraft or firearms unless the following criteria are met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There will be no unacceptable disturbance to local residents;</li> <li>• There will be no unacceptable disturbance to farm livestock and wildlife;</li> <li>• There will be no conflict with the enjoyment of areas used for informal recreation, and;</li> <li>• The ambient noise level in the area of the proposed development is already high and the noise likely to be produced by the new activity will not be dominant.</li> </ul> <p>In certain cases the Council may only consider it appropriate to grant a temporary permission to allow the impact of noise levels and any potential disturbance or nuisance to be more fully assessed.</p>

## OBJECTIVES

SOC OBJ 11 To develop and implement a Play Strategy for Co Meath in conjunction with the County Development Board and other agencies.

SOC OBJ 12 To prepare standards for the provision of ancillary leisure facilities and open space within residential developments as an integral part of the overall development and at the developers expense following the publication of the Sporting Facilities and Amenities Audit by the Meath Local Sports Partnership.

#### 7.8.4 Public Open Space

The Residential Density Guidelines for Planning Authorities indicates that public open space is one of the key elements in defining the quality of the residential environment. As outlined in Chapter 10 (Development Management Guidelines & Standards), much greater emphasis should be placed on the quality of open space to be provided. In new development areas, Local Area Plans or Framework Plans should identify at an early stage the preferred location of larger open spaces including, if considered appropriate, locations in the non development areas adjoining the development areas. The criteria used for selecting the preferred locations should include preservation of natural landscaping features, accessibility and gradient. Suitable pedestrian linkage between open spaces should be identified and where appropriate cycle lanes provided.



The Local Area Plan or Framework Plan should identify the requisite standard of large scale public open space required having regard to the existing provision of such facilities. Ideally a hierarchical system of open space should be distributed throughout housing areas and neighbourhoods, ranging from small areas where children can play in sight of their homes to larger areas where older children can partake in casual ball playing and other play activities. It is desirable that large areas of public open space be located adjacent to existing or proposed neighbourhood centres, community facilities and educational campuses in order to facilitate multi-purpose use.

In certain circumstances, where these standards cannot be met and more intensive recreational facilities may be desirable, the provision of such facilities in lieu will be considered or contributions may be levied towards the provision of public facilities, as provided for in Part III Section 48 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000.

In greenfield sites which are being developed for medium to high density (i.e. > 30 units per hectare) or those sites for which a Local Area Plan or Framework Plan is required, public open space shall be provided at a minimum rate of 15% of the total site area. This open space should be in the form of useful open spaces within residential developments and, where appropriate, larger neighbourhood parks to serve the wider communities. In all other cases, public open space should be provided at a minimum rate of 10% of the total site area.

A variety of types and sizes of open spaces should be provided to cater for the active and passive recreational needs for children and adults of all ages. The minimum requirements per 1,000 population (in excess of 350 conventional housing units) for the different types of open space is set out below.

It is the intention of the Planning Authorities that, where practical, additional open space shall be provided at a minimum rate of 3.2 hectares (8.0 acres) per 1,000 population. Discretion is required to take account of the composition of different housing units and the different demographic characteristics which may result from same. The preferred make up of this open space is outlined below:

Proposed Use	Minimum Standard
Children's Play Area	0.4 ha
Urban Parks / General Amenity Space	1.2 ha
Playing Fields	1.6 ha
Overall Requirements	3.2 ha

The general amenity space / urban parks is in addition to the provision of playing fields and is for more informal play than the playing fields which may also be used for local sports organisations, as considered appropriate.

A minimum of 400 sq. m. of children's play area is required for a development of 40 dwellings or more (based on average occupancy of 2.9 persons per house). The minimum units of open space shall be 200 sq. m. with any one side being greater than 10 metres. No account will be taken of incidental open space such as grass margins, left over areas, nor any area due to its nature (e.g. marshy) or topography (slope) which is deemed unsuitable.

The location, siting and design of the open space will have regard to the following:

- i) Be well designed and of a high visual standard so that it is functional and accessible to all;
- ii) Provide for the retention of existing natural features;
- iii) Include proposals for drainage and landscaping of the public open space;
- iv) Houses shall not be permitted to back onto open spaces;
- v) Provide high levels of natural surveillance and overlooking by as many houses as possible, and;
- vi) Be provided with a boundary fence / wall where such open space is adjacent to a main access road or Local Distributor Road.

#### POLICY

##### SOC POL 45

No residential development shall be permitted on lands that are subject of a deed of dedication or identified in a planning application as open space to ensure the availability of community and recreational facilities for the residents of the area.

## 7.9 LIBRARIES

The library service provided by Meath County Council is playing an increasingly important community, information, cultural and outreach facility role within the county. The public library service has for many years provided an important means of access to information and to leisure

reading facilities and has played a major role in the advancement in education and literacy in our county. It has also become an important venue for cultural activities.

Meath County Council supports the county public library service from its headquarters in Navan. In addition there are 12 branches throughout the county. They are located in:

- Ashbourne
- Athboy
- Duleek
- Dunboyne
- Dunshaughlin
- Kells
- Laytown
- Navan
- Nobber
- Oldcastle
- Slane
- Trim



The Ashbourne, Dunboyne and Oldcastle libraries were opened in 2004. Ashbourne Library is located in the Council's "One Stop Shop" within the newly developing town centre expansion in Ashbourne. Oldcastle Library was completed in partnership with Oldcastle Credit Union. The library is located on the ground floor of the building and has a shared meeting room with the Credit Union to facilitate events which the Library Service is running. Dunboyne Library is part of a major new complex, which includes facilities for Rehab Care and the Health Service Executive, North East.

Membership of the library service currently stands at 22,500 and the abolition of membership charges ensures that the library service is available to all. Embracing the cultural diversity of the county, the library service now includes stock in many of the European languages, including the Eastern European

languages, Chinese, Russian and Arabic, all for lending at the Navan and Ashbourne Public Libraries. The internet service is an additional tool of communication available to the residents of Meath and thereby has the potential to support a more inclusive society.

Meath County Libraries encourage groups and individuals to use the facilities for a wide range of activities. Most of the libraries can be accessed by community groups, free of charge, for the following:

- Exhibitions
- Displays
- Meeting areas
- Lectures
- Adult education classes

Local groups and individuals are also encouraged to distribute their leaflets in all the libraries.

In April 2005, Meath County Council approved the Five Year Development Plan 2005-2009 which sets out a number of measures to be implemented by 2009. It provides for the expansion of the service with new libraries planned for Ballivor, Laytown and Kells. Major upgrades of the libraries at Duleek and Navan are also proposed in the Five Year Development Plan. Finally, it proposes to relocate the County Library HQ in Navan.

The provision of library facilities at Kells, Navan and Trim will be dealt with in their respective town development plans whilst the provision of the facility at Laytown has been provided for in the East Meath LAPs. The proposed facility at Ballivor will address the deficiency of service in the south-west of the county as highlighted in the Socio Economic Profile.

#### POLICY

SOC POL 46	To continue to expand and improve the library service to meet the needs of the community, in line with the objectives and priorities of the Library Development Plan and subject to the availability of finance.
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#### OBJECTIVES

SOC OBJ 13	To enhance library facilities in Navan, and to retain its function as library headquarters for the county.
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SOC OBJ 14	To investigate and if feasible provide a new library within the Bettystown town centre redevelopment.
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SOC OBJ 15	To provide a library facility at Ballivor.
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### 7.10 BURIAL GROUNDS / GRAVE YARDS / CEMETERIES

Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide for burial facilities, although the majority of facilities in Meath are provided by religious bodies. This power was transferred to Local Authorities in the interests of public health, to regulate the opening of new burial grounds and also to order the discontinuing of burials in specified places.

Under the Planning and Development Act 2000, the Planning Authority can include objectives to reserve land for burial grounds. The individual Local Area Plans and Graig Design Statements will examine the adequacy of the existing facilities to cater for the plan period and will reserve lands within each development centre for burial facilities as required.

Changes in society have resulted in the Local Authorities providing multi-denominational grave yards in their jurisdiction. For example St Finian's cemetery has been developed by Meath County Council and is located on the Athboy Road, Navan. A new cemetery has also been provided at the Rath, north of Ashbourne and is the result of a venture between Meath County Council and a local developer who provided the site. There are approximately 115 graveyards in total in Co Meath.



In addition to the actual provision of burial grounds, another important planning issue is to recognise and protect the heritage value of the existing graveyards, often located in the grounds of old churches. Graveyards had been provided on a parish basis in Ireland and very frequently were in the vicinity of and associated with the ruins of churches that had existed in previous centuries. These burial places were controlled locally – in the case of Catholic burial grounds by the parish priest and his parishioners. Some of these may be national monuments or in the grounds / curtilage of protected structures.

In recent years there has been a tendency to remove outdated central control over the provision and operation of burial grounds and to devolve responsibility to the local level. It is becoming the norm to designate responsibility for the management of these to local community groups with the Local Authority providing funding on an annual basis to purchase equipment.

#### POLICIES

SOC POL 47	To facilitate the provision of new (non-denominational) burial grounds and the extension of existing cemeteries as appropriate to cater for the needs of the county.
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SOC POL 48	To protect the cultural heritage of historical burial grounds within Co. Meath and encourage their management and maintenance in accordance with conservation principles.
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SOC POL 49	To encourage local community groups to develop, manage and maintain new burial facilities.
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### 7.11 FIRE SERVICE



Fire fighting is an important safety service provided by the local authority. There are seven fire stations at strategic locations throughout the county. Navan (the headquarters of the network), Trim, Kells, Oldcastle, Nobber, Dunshaughlin and Ashbourne. According to a recent grading all stations with the exception of the one at Nobber have the full range of facilities that are deemed to be necessary.

The fire service also has a responsibility in relation to fire safety standards in the design of new and improved buildings, changes of use and also in relation to the fire safety aspects of the daily use of buildings which are accessed by the public. Under the Building Regulations, separate applications are sent to the Fire Service to obtain a Fire Safety Certificate and this is obtained prior to construction.

The role and functions of the fire service are intertwined with other core services of Meath County Council such as planning, housing, water services and roads:

- Planning decisions can have a major effect on the fire risk level in a particular area;
- Good housing maintenance practices can impact significantly on the level of chimney fires;
- Housing personnel liaise regularly with tenants and can be a conduit for fire safety messages;
- Fire services water supply requirements need to be taken into account in designing water supply systems, and;
- The quality of roads and traffic management systems can affect fire brigade incident response times.

It is important, therefore, for the benefit of the community, that there are effective working relationships and co-operation between the fire service and the other local authority services on a continuous basis.

The Fire Service Change Programme (FSCP) was launched by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage & Local Government in February 2005. The aim of the Fire Services Change Programme is to develop and implement programmes to bring about a significant improvement in the safety of property and people. This will involve the development of an over-arching risk management culture which will guide the whole approach to fire safety. The FSCP must ensure that a high quality fire service working closely with other local authority services, can effectively and efficiently contribute to a safer society through its fire safety work, its fire prevention work and its incident response systems. This involves a shift in focus from the traditional response role of the service to protecting people through prevention and mitigation. Meath County Council is preparing a plan for the development and expansion of emergency services in the County in line with best practice and the Fire Service Change Programme.

#### POLICY

##### SOC POL 50

To continue to provide a modern and effective fire service for the county and to facilitate the accommodation of fire service facilities in locations that allow ease of access and safe functioning with respect to the road network.

## 7.12 ARTS AND CULTURAL FACILITIES

Arts and cultural facilities not only contribute to the artistic, social and general quality of life of residents but also attract visitors and investment to the area. Arts and cultural facilities are wide ranging and include community and arts centres, museums, theatres and music venues. Libraries can also serve as arts and cultural outlets and are dealt with separately. Through the appointment of a County Arts Officer and the development of a County Arts Development Plan 2005-2007, Meath County Council has affirmed its belief in the importance of the arts to individuals and communities. It recognises the importance of the arts in the areas of personal development, community development, employment and tourism. The Council will endeavour to provide a balanced cultural provision to the county with regard to music, film, theatre, dance, visual arts, literature and opera.

The arts sector in Meath is a vibrant one, which encompasses a broad range of people, places and activities. Artists of many disciplines live and work in Meath, and, together with professional arts organisations, amateur groups and community groups engaged in artistic activity, there is a considerable pool of artistic talent and enterprise in the county.





The Arts Development Plan sets out measures to further formalise support structures and create opportunities for the arts both within the local authority and the county. The Arts Development Plan aims to increase access to the arts for all sectors of the community, encourage and increase awareness and interest in the arts and increase participation in the arts by all sectors of the community.

The construction of the Arts Centre in Navan was undertaken as the first part of the Fair Green redevelopment. This facility consists of a three hundred and twenty seat theatre, visual art exhibition space, studio and workshop space and café-bar facilities. The Council is also developing other facilities including the Toradh Gallery, Duleek; the planned exhibition facilities and Art Mart at the Ashbourne Council Offices, the Meath County Council Mobile Music Centre and the planned development of a Literary Centre adjacent to the Ledwidge Cottage Museum, Slane.

In addition to these facilities, Meath County Council intends to work with local agencies and community groups in exploring the development potential for facilities such as the Duleek Court House, St Vincent de Paul House, Kells and the Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann proposed Music and Archive Centre at Kilmainhamwood.

#### POLICIES

SOC POL 51	To continue to enhance the range and quality of arts provision in Co. Meath to support the ongoing development of cultural infrastructure throughout the County.
SOC POL 52	To continue to recognise the importance of the arts in areas of personal development, community development, employment and tourism and to endeavour to create opportunities in each of these areas.
SOC POL 53	To support the development and provision of arts and cultural facilities at sites including the Duleek Court House, St Vincent de Paul House, Kells and the Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann proposed Music and Archive Centre at Kilmainhamwood.
SOC POL 54	To liaise with the County Arts Officer on any development proposal that is likely to have a significant impact on the arts.

#### 7.13 PUBLIC ART

Public art can assist in developing a sense of place and provides an identity and character to a community that is distinctive and unique. Public art has many advantages – increasing environmental quality, enhancing the built environment / public realm, creating a sense of place, nurturing civic pride, promoting tourism and providing additional employment opportunities for artists.



The Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism in 2004 prepared a document entitled "Public Art Per Cent for Art Scheme General National Guidelines". The Per Cent for Art Scheme is implemented by major government departments in connection with capital works such as the construction of public buildings, roads and renovation and regeneration projects.

It defines public art as the following:

*"Public art, broadly defined, can take many forms and perform many functions. It may be an object of civic pride or a cause of stimulating debate. It may provide edification or entertainment. It may be a source of private pleasure and solace or popular self-recognition and inclusion".*

While public art has traditionally been conceived primarily in terms of the plastic arts - most particularly permanent outdoor sculpture – a broader range of possibilities have been fruitfully explored in recent years.

The scope of public art has widened to include not just sculpture's close relations, architecture and painting, but also music, literature, film, video, multimedia and sound art, as well as the various performing arts including theatre, dance, opera, performance and live art.

Public art can be of any duration, temporary or permanent and can be centred in a rural or urban context. For example, the National Roads Authority commission pieces of art to be included as part of all new road schemes. Public art is wide in its remit and includes architecture which in turn affects the built environment. The Regional Planning Guidelines emphasise that the built environment is not static, but is continually developing and evolving. The structures of today will become the heritage of the future.

The Arts Development Plan 2005-2007 includes a section on public art. Since 1998 Meath County Council has commissioned eleven public art features bringing the total under the Council's care to seventeen. The Arts Development Plan state that it is Meath County Council's policy to identify those major private capital investment schemes which provide an opportunity to include a public art feature as an aspect of the overall development.

Monuments / features of public art have also been commissioned to commemorate a particular event or the outstanding achievements of a local person. For example, in Nobber there is a statue of the musician and renowned harpist O'Carolan whilst the Local Authorities included a sculpture of a miller's wheel signifying the rich industrial heritage of Navan in the development of the viewing area at the confluence of the Boyne and Blackwater.



## POLICIES

SOC POL 55	To promote the provision of public art, including temporary art and sculpture, through such mechanisms as the government supported Percent for Art Scheme and the development management process.
SOC POL 56	The Planning Authority will require major new commercial and private residential developments in the County to incorporate works of public art into the overall scheme in order to enhance the amenities of the local environment.
SOC POL 57	To encourage and support the creation and display of works of art in public areas, including appropriate locations within the streetscape, provided no unacceptable environmental, amenity, traffic or other problems are created.



