

Chapter 4. Sligo Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan (RSES)

In accordance with the NPF, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly's *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy* (RSES) sets out a development framework for the region "leading with the key role of Sligo in the North-West".

Section 3.7(c) of the RSES includes a **Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan** for Sligo, seeking to ensure that the place grows as a successful population, employment and service centre which is "enterprising, inclusive, resilient and environmentally sustainable".

The RGC Strategic Plan contains fifteen **regional policy objectives (RPOs)** grouped under **three strategic goals** identified as "Compact Growth", "Enterprising Sligo" and "Liveable Sligo".

The Strategic Plan indicates the means to achieve these goals, highlights strategic growth areas (with a further six RPOs), regeneration sites and infrastructure, and lists key projects to be delivered over the life of the RSES.

Some of the RPOs have already been achieved since the publication of the RSES in 2020, while the implementation of several other RPOs was ongoing at the time of drafting this Development Plan.

Although the implementation of several RPOs has been completed, the strategic goals for the RGC remain the same. This chapter includes further strategic objectives supporting development in the Regional Growth Centre.

4.1 RGC Strategic Plan area

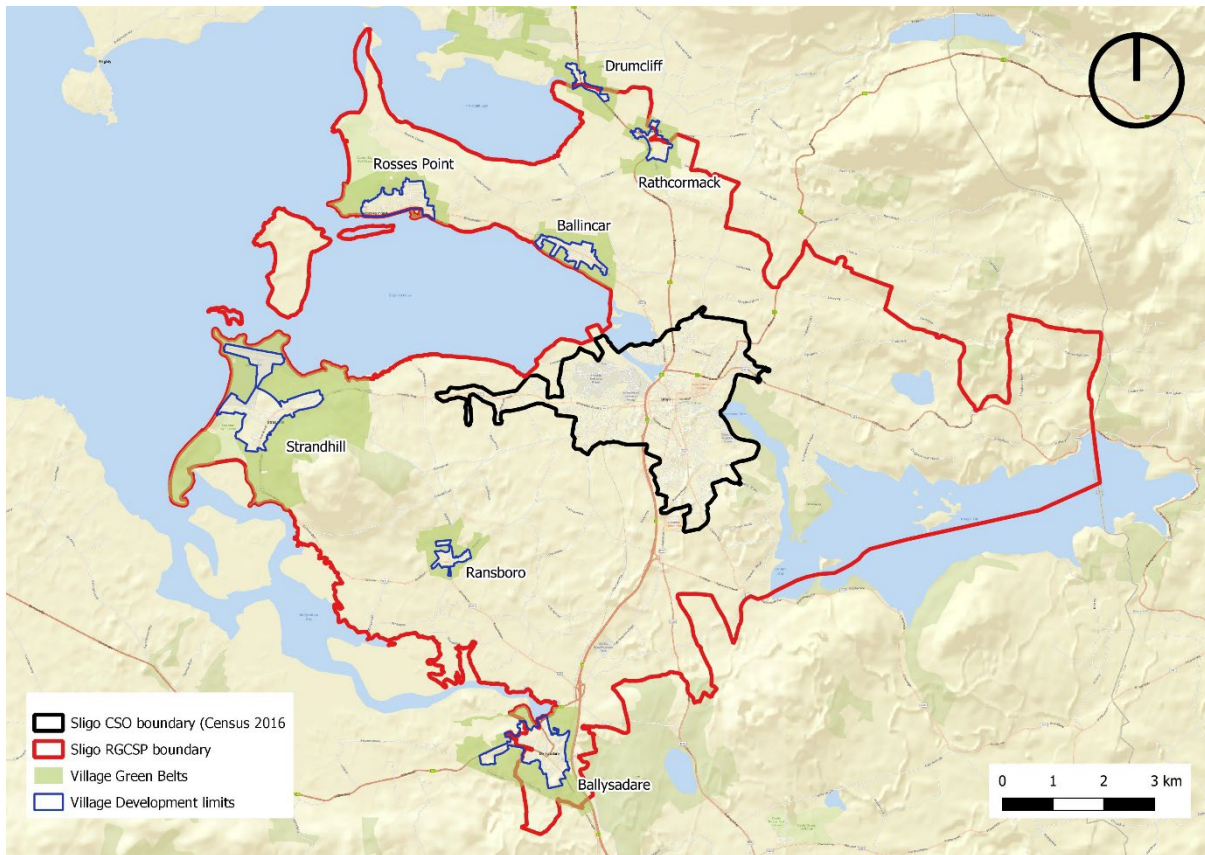
The County's Settlement Strategy focuses on the development of the Regional Growth Centre (RGC) as recommended by the NPF and supported by the RSES.

The Sligo RGC Strategic Plan covers Sligo Town and its Environs together with a significant rural hinterland. The Strategic Plan area had a population of 28,465 people in 2016 (Census data) of which 68% (19,413 persons) resided in the "principal urban area" (PUA) of Sligo and Environs.

The boundaries of the Sligo RGC SP, as shown in the RSES, are based on the CSO's Small Areas (basic statistical units for the purposes of Census 2016). The selection includes Sligo Town's closest satellite villages of Ballysadare, Strandhill and Rosses Point together with all major employers and educational institutions located outside the Town (see Fig. 4.A).

In 2016, the three villages provided homes and local services for a combined population of 3,986 persons, rising to 4,612 in 2022 (Census). While they do offer a variety of jobs, these commuter villages are heavily reliant upon Sligo for employment. Strandhill and Rosses Point have additional tourism functions, with corresponding employment opportunities.

Fig. 4.A Extent of the Sligo RGC Strategic Plan area



(source: NWRA RSES, as updated in May 2020)

4.2 RGC strategic goals and RPOs

The Regional Strategy specifies three strategic goals for the RGC:

- **Compact Growth** – expressed through nine Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs)
- **Enterprising Sligo** – two RPOs
- **Liveable Sligo** – four RPOs

The following sub-sections indicate how the RSES goals and RPOs are integrated into this development plan.

4.2.1 Strategic goal – Compact Growth

Section 3.7(c) of the RSES suggests that compact growth can be achieved through regeneration and consolidation, planned expansion and improved mobility. The corresponding RPOs 3.7.37 to 3.7.45 set out the main development parameters for the RGC up to 2040. Their incorporation in various chapters of this Plan is detailed below:

❖ **RPO 3.7.37 – Sligo Town’s population to reach at least 27,200 by 2040**

The population target for Sligo Town is set out in Chapter 5 Settlement Strategy.

❖ **RPO 3.7.38 – Between 3,000 and 5,000 houses to be built by 2040**

The housing allocation for Sligo Town is set out in **Chapter 3 Core Strategy Statement**. The allocation amounts to circa 2,650 dwellings to be delivered by 2030. This would facilitate the achievement of the target set by RPO 3.7.38 for 2040.

❖ **RPO 3.7.39 – Minimum 40% of development to take place on infill and brownfield sites**

The Settlement Capacity Audit (SCA) for Sligo Town, included in **Chapter 11 (Volume 2)** demonstrates that more than 40% of new housing development can be accommodated on infill and brownfield sites.

❖ **RPO 3.7.40 – Eastern Garavogue Bridge and Approach Roads Scheme to be completed by 2021**

As the scheme could not be completed by 2021, a **strategic objective** (SO-RGC-1) is included in this chapter and a **regional and local roads objective** (O-RLR-2) is included in **Chapter 29 Transport Infrastructure (Volume 3)**.

❖ **RPO 3.7.41 – Western Distributor Road to be completed by 2020**

The Western Distributor Road has been completed on time, therefore this RPO has been achieved.

❖ **RPO 3.7.42 – Prioritise development on greenfield sites served by the above roads**

The Settlement Capacity Audit carried out for Sligo Town prioritises greenfield lands at Oakfield and Ballinode for development in conjunction with the WDR and the Eastern Garavogue Bridge and Roads Scheme.

❖ **RPO 3.7.43 – Complete the vehicular “ring route” around Sligo’s town centre**

The Strategic Transport Objectives for Sligo Town, included in **Chapter 11 (Volume 2)**, specify the corridors to be reserved for the provision of the urban roads necessary to improve circulation around the town centre.

❖ **RPO 3.7.44 – Carry out a building height study targeting housing densities above 50 units per hectare in the town centre**

The required building height study will be carried out in conjunction with the preparation of a Local Area Plan for Sligo and Environs. A strategic objective in this regard is included in this chapter.

❖ **RPO 3.7.45 – Retain free from development the agricultural land within the RGC SP area which is not subject to zoning in a statutory plan**

Within the RGC Strategic Plan area, the lands zoned for development as part of this Plan are located in Sligo Town, Ballysadare, Strandhill and Rosses Point.

This Plan includes adequate provisions to generally retain the current agricultural use on all greenfield lands located outside the development limits of the four zoned settlements, and outside the village boundaries of Ballinacra, Drumcliff, Rathcormac and Ransboro.

The entire RGC SP area is located in the designated rural area under urban influence (RAUI) surrounding Sligo Town. The relevant strategic settlement policy for RAUI is SP-S-9 in Chapter 5 of this Plan.

4.2.2 Strategic goal – Enterprising Sligo

The RSES indicates that local economic development should be achieved through supporting higher education, servicing new business and enterprise zones, investing in transport infrastructure and the Smart City Initiative, and progressing tourism projects. Some of these actions fall outside the remit of the CDP but are adequately supported through the LECP/Sligo 2030 strategy.

❖ **RPO 3.7.46 – Facilitate the development of a new IDA Business Park at Oakfield**

This RPO is implemented through the strategic policy SP-RGC-2 (in this chapter) for the IDA lands at Oakfield, and in the zoning included in **Chapter 11 Sligo Town Plan** (Volume 2).

❖ **RPO 3.7.47 – Promote local heritage and culture to deliver tourism products of regional and national significance**

While the promotion of local heritage and cultural tourism is normally carried out by specialised, statutory bodies (e.g. Heritage Council, Failte Ireland), Sligo County Council has included relevant actions in its LECP/Sligo 2030 strategy.

This County Development Plan contains policies designed to protect natural and cultural heritage (**Chapters 23 Landscape Character, 24 Natural Heritage, 25 Built Heritage**). Overall, the CDP sets a comprehensive policy framework which is adequate for managing proposals related to tourism developments of any scale – local, regional or national (refer to Volume 3, **Chapter 28 Economic development**).

❖ **RPO 3.7.52 – Consolidate existing IDA Business Park at Finisklin and expand enterprise uses into the northern Docklands area**

This RPO is reflected in the strategic policies for the IDA lands at Finisklin (SP-RGC-2) and for the Docklands area (SO-RGC-5) included in this chapter, and in the zoning objectives for Sligo Town (**Chapter 11, Volume 2**).

❖ **RPO 3.7.53 – Encourage new companies to locate on lands zoned for business, industry and enterprise at Ballytivnan and Rathbraughan (north of Sligo Town)**

This RPO is reflected in the zoning objectives for Sligo Town (**Chapter 11, Volume 2**).

❖ **RPO 3.7.54 – Improvements to national roads N-4, N-15, N-16, N-17**

The implementation of this RPO is within the remit of the TII, with funding provided through the National Development Plan. The CDP supports the RPO through its national roads objectives contained in **Chapter 29 Transport infrastructure** (Volume 3).

❖ **RPO 3.7.55 – “Give effect to the infrastructure” needed to transform Sligo into a ‘Smart City’**

The implementation of relevant infrastructure policies contained in Volume 2 of this Plan will support the transformation of Sligo into a ‘Smart City’ as envisaged by the LECP/Sligo 2030 document.

❖ **RPO 3.7.56 – Support tourism development in Sligo Town, Strandhill and Rosses Point**

This RPO is reflected in the provisions of **Section 28.3 Tourism (Chapter 28 Economic development**, in Volume 3). In addition, the Special Coastal Tourism functions are retained in the Settlement Strategy for Strandhill and Rosses Point.

❖ **RPO 3.7.57 – Seek an increase in the number of jobs in the RGC to 17,000 by 2040**

This RPO is addressed in the Sligo Town Plan (**Chapter 11**) essentially by zoning sufficient, serviced and suitable land for residential and business/enterprise development, in order to accommodate the additional population targeted by the NPF, with a corresponding growth in the number of persons employed in the RGC SP area.

4.2.3 Strategic goal – Liveable Sligo

Relating mainly to Sligo Town, this goal requires the enhancement of the built environment and the use of open space to benefit residents, support businesses and attract tourists. Three “Key liveability projects” are listed – the O’Connell Street enhancement (completed in 2022), the Stephen Street Cultural Plaza, completed in 2024 and renamed Queen Maeve Square, and the “Green Link South” to potential future greenways.

❖ **RPO 3.7.48 – Upgrade the town centre through focused public realm interventions**

This RPO is reflected in the strategic objective **SO-RGC-8** in this chapter.

❖ **RPO 3.7.49 – Prepare and implement a new masterplan for the Centre Block**

This RPO is reflected in the strategic objective **SO-RGC-6** in this chapter.

❖ **RPO 3.7.50 – Complete the major recreational complex at Cleveragh/Doorly Park**

This RPO is reflected in the strategic objective for green corridors in **Chapter 11 Sligo Town** (Volume 2).

❖ **RPO 3.7.51 – Expand cycle and walking routes through the urban area and outwards**

This RPO is reflected in the strategic objective for green corridors in **Chapter 11 Sligo Town**.

4.3 Strategic growth areas

The Regional Strategy distinguishes between three categories of strategic growth areas:

- predominantly residential areas – Docklands, Caltragh, Ballinode;
- regeneration areas – Town Centre, Cranmore, Docklands;
- industry and technology areas – Finisklin, Ballytivnan-Rathbraughan, Oakfield.

In addition to the RPOs 3.7.52 to 3.7.57, which have been addressed in Section 4.2.2 above (Strategic goal – Enterprising Sligo), the RSES argues in favour of releasing lands from the Strategic Land Reserve in order to support the development potential at Caltragh and Ballinode. This has been done based on the outcome of the Settlement Capacity Audit for Sligo Town.

The Docklands area is described as “an established working landscape”, subject of “piecemeal development over the years” but still “largely unutilised”. Its potential for future residential commercial, community and enterprise uses is repeatedly highlighted in the RSES.

The recommended redevelopment framework for the Docklands should focus on:

- the retention of the Port as a valuable piece of commercial/industrial infrastructure;
- remediation of the former landfill and other potentially contaminated lands;
- revised street/road layout and improved connectivity with Sligo centre;
- an improved mix of uses, including community, commercial and residential;
- enhanced provision of open space in the form of linear parks and cycle/pedestrian routes;
- the provision of a cultural landmark building;
- the re-use of former industrial buildings for creative enterprises and the new community uses.

A strategic objective for the Docklands area is included in this chapter – refer to **SO-RGC-5**.

Strategic sites for regeneration

The Docklands is not the only area earmarked by the RSES for urban regeneration. The Cranmore Regeneration Project, based on the masterplan launched in 2016, is yet to be completed. In the centre of Sligo Town, the Centre Block (Wine Street car park), the Courthouse Block and the Quay Quarter are also designated for regeneration with strong heritage, urban design and public realm elements.

The above requirements are transposed in this Plan through the strategic objectives **SO-RGC-3**, **SO-RGC-6**, **SO-RGC-7** and **SO-RGC-8**.

4.4 Strategic infrastructure

In order to achieve the desired population and employment growth, the RSES lists key infrastructure projects that need to be delivered.

Transport infrastructure projects such as the Eastern Bridge and Approach Roads Scheme, the Western Distributor Road and the realignment of national roads N-15 and N-16 have already been mentioned in relation to the implementation of RPOs 3.7.40, 3.7.41 and 3.7.54 (see sections above).

The RSES restates the strategic importance of the Inner Relief Road (N-4) and the need to improve its relationship with adjoining urban areas and to soften the “boundary” effect while enhancing junction capacity. In addition, it is essential to complete the “ring route” around Sligo’s town centre, by providing a link from Mail Coach Road to Burton Street.

These requirements are set out in **Chapter 11 Sligo Town Plan** and will be detailed in the Local Area Plan for Sligo and Environs.

The Port, the wastewater treatment infrastructure and the potential local gas network are also mentioned in the RSES as existing or envisaged strategic infrastructure for the Regional Growth Centre. Objectives are included in this chapter.

Strategic policies for Sligo Regional Growth Centre

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

- SP-RGC-1** Support population, housing and employment growth in Sligo RGC to achieve the targets set in the RSES (2020) and subsequent reviews.
- SP-RGC-2** Assist the IDA in the development of a new Business Park at Oakfield.
- SP-RGC-3** Ensure that the required infrastructure is in place to support the transformation of Sligo into a Smart City as envisaged in the LECP/Sligo 2030 strategy.

Strategic objectives for Sligo Regional Growth Centre

It is an objective of Sligo County Council to:

Circulation

- SO-RGC-1** Support RSES provisions (including RPO 3.7.40) relating to the completion of the Eastern Garavogue Bridge and Approach Roads Scheme within the lifetime of this development plan.

Housing

- SO-RGC-2** Carry out a building height study targeting increased housing densities in Sligo Town Centre in conjunction with the preparation of a Local Area Plan for Sligo and Environs. **[PA-9]**
- SO-RGC-3** Complete the implementation of the Cranmore Regeneration Project.
- SO-RGC-4** Seek the development of new urban quarters at Caltragh and Ballinode, based on land assembly and comprehensive masterplanning with appropriate phasing.

Regeneration

- SO-RGC-5** Prepare a masterplan for the Docklands area, focusing on the provision of mixed residential, employment and recreational uses while retaining the functions of a fully operational Port.
- SO-RGC-6** Coordinate and oversee the implementation of the masterplan for the Centre Block/Wine Street Car Park area, aiming to deliver a mixture of housing and employment uses through a high-quality urban design solution.
- SO-RGC-7** In conjunction with ATU Sligo, prepare and implement a masterplan for the City Campus site – Sligo’s Cultural and Learning Hub involving the regeneration of this block of the town incorporating new County Library and museum facilities, enterprise space, residential units and high-quality public realm.
- SO-RGC-8** Pursue the refurbishment of Sligo’s town centre in line with the Public Realm Plan.

Water infrastructure

- SO-RGC-9** In co-operation with Uisce Éireann, pursue the provision of the water service infrastructure upgrades and expansion necessary to support the planned development of Sligo Regional Growth Centre. **[PA-10]**