

3. County Sligo – Settlement Strategy



3.1 Growth model

This section expands on the core aims of the Development Plan by setting out a settlement strategy for the urban and rural parts of the County. The settlement strategy draws on the RPGs and *Sligo Sub-Regional Development Strategy 2001-2021*. That Strategy, prepared in 2001, anticipated Sligo's designation as a Gateway City prior to the publication of the NSS. Having reconsidered population forecasts in light of the NSS, the Council is eager to provide a proactive basis for the future development and regeneration of the County, developing Sligo into a city with a critical mass that is necessary to sustain the County and the North-Western Region into the future.

This involves aiming towards a long-term, strategic population horizon of between 50,000 and 80,000 people over the next 20 to 30 years (a pace of development similar to that experienced in Galway over the past several decades). Such a population horizon should be a strategic reference point for actions at the day-to-day level, which would ordinarily be driven by providing for population growth based on past performance. Therefore, the approach taken in this Development Plan, is not a *predict and provide* one, but rather a *plan → monitor → manage* approach that ensures that Sligo can reach its Gateway status, with adjustments to land use zoning occurring during the preparation of subsequent local area plans and other land use plans for settlements throughout the County.

In adopting a proactive approach to development in line with NSS projections, the Council has decided to pursue faster growth than was originally anticipated in the *Sub-Regional Development Strategy 2001-2021*. The Faster Growth Scenario (refer to Section 1.3.1. Estimates of future population) suggests that the population of County Sligo could grow from 58,200 in 2002 to approximately 75,000 by 2011. The Council acknowledges that to achieve such growth, it will depend significantly on assistance from Central Government, in terms of key policy decisions on issues such as:

- the decentralisation of state and/or semi-state bodies;
- the provision of infrastructure (road, rail, air, energy and telecommunications);
- working in partnership with key organisations, whose remit it is to promote and/or secure economic development;
- marketing and promoting Sligo as an attractive place to live and work and ensuring that the County has a robust settlement structure, manages its growth and maintains its attractive landscape context.
- promotion of Sligo by the IDA and other agencies, to attract business/industry to the region.

Fig. 3.a Settlement strategy principles



3.2 County settlement strategy

The overall settlement strategy for County Sligo is based on the following principal requirements:

1. The promotion and development of Sligo as a Gateway City – a nationally significant urban centre, whose location and scale support the desired critical mass necessary to sustain strong levels of economic growth and prosperity in the North-West.

2. Careful growth management in the Sligo Sub-Region – the commuter belt of the greater Sligo City area. This area corresponds with what the NSS describes as ‘rural areas under strong urban influences’.

3. The development of Key Support Towns to serve rural areas. Throughout much of County Sligo, particularly the south and west, there is a need to address the regional imbalance at County level and build on the strengths and scale of existing settlements. Three Key Support Towns have been identified – Ballymote, Tobercurry and Enniscrone – to assist in promoting, sustaining and diversifying the rural economy.

The settlement strategy principles are highlighted in Figures 3.a and 3.b, and details of each are outlined in the following subsections.

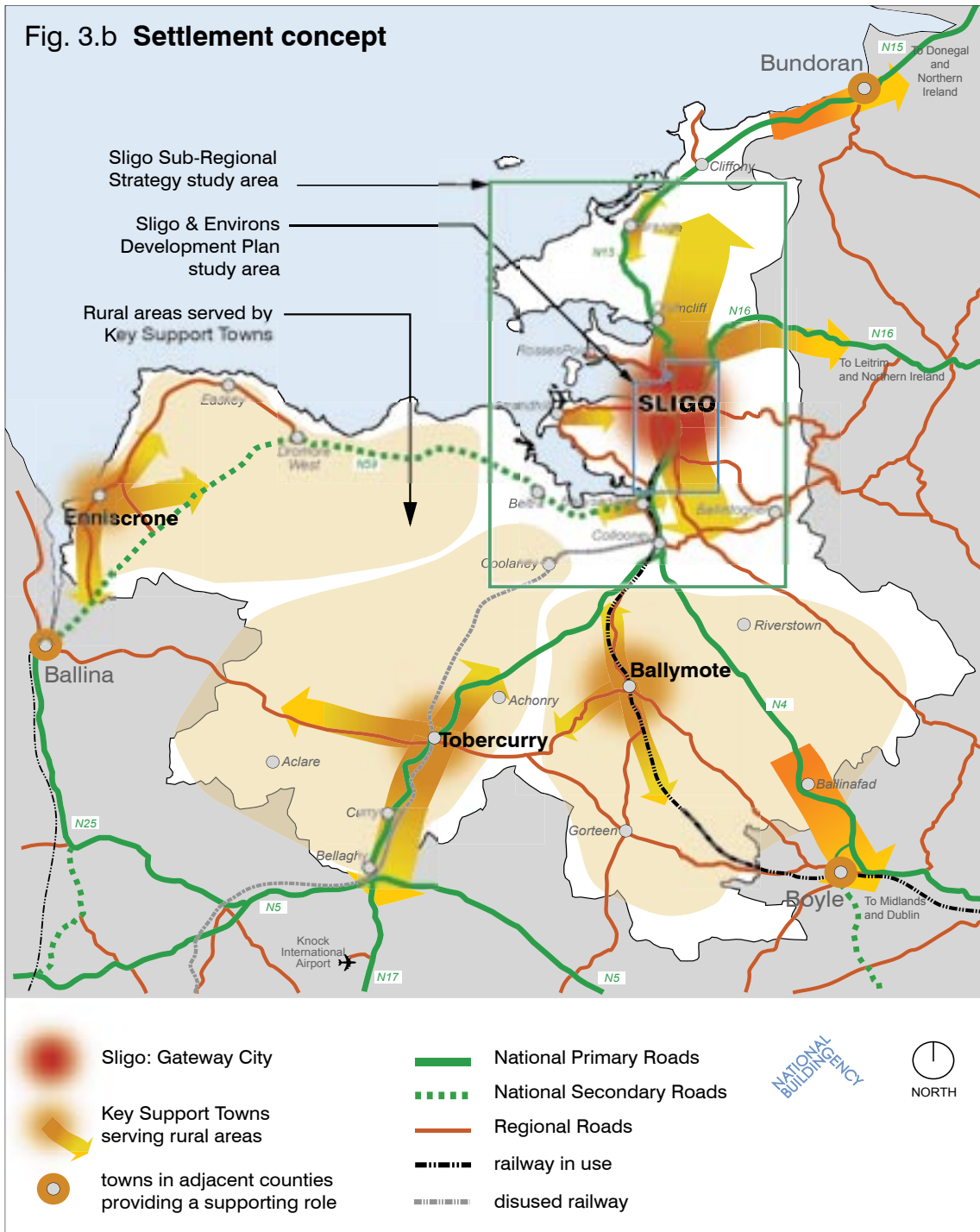
3.3 Sligo – Gateway City to the North-West

The promotion and development of Sligo as a Gateway City has been provided for through the framework of the *Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2004–2010*¹. In order to develop as a Gateway City, it needs to achieve the necessary critical mass to become a ‘Growth Driver’ and the ‘City of the North-West’, with the full range and complement of services and functions expected of a European city.

In addition, the development of the necessary infrastructure associated with a city, such as an efficient public transport system, cultural facilities, sports centres, entertainment quarters and regional offices, requires a significant population base. It is therefore envisaged, under the Faster Growth Scenario, that Sligo City may need to accommodate a population of 35,000+ by the year 2011.

¹The *Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2004–2010* covers an area that includes the administrative area of Sligo Borough Council and extends beyond it to include lands outside its boundary, within the County Council jurisdiction, including the townlands of Lisnalurg, Teesan, Rathaberna, Carncash and Kiltycooly to the north and east, Ballydoogan, Oakfield, Knappagh More and Carrowmore to the west, Tonaphubble to the south-east, Carrowkeel, Drumaskibbole and Carrownamaddoo to the south, and the eastern banks of Lough Gill to the east. The area incorporated in the *Sligo and Environs Development Plan* is excluded from the policy coverage of this County Development Plan.

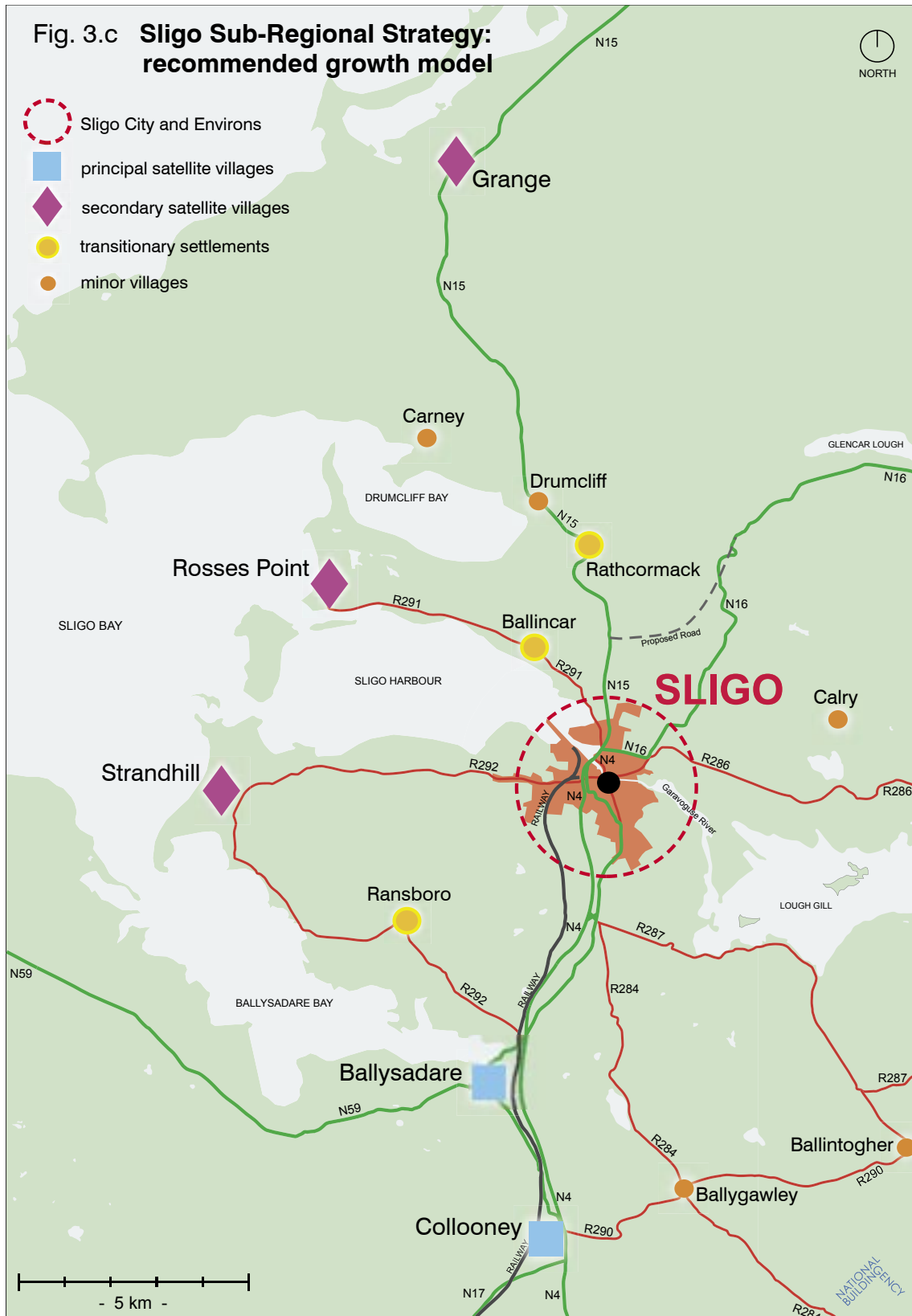
Fig. 3.b Settlement concept



3.4 Growth management in the Sub-Region

The *Sligo Sub-Regional Development Strategy 2001-2021* established a framework to manage the growth of the Sligo Sub-Region, an area that is generally under pressure from urban-generated housing, owing to its proximity to Sligo City and Environs, including the settlements that have a satellite or dormitory role (refer to Fig. 3.c).

In order to ensure that Sligo's development as a Gateway can take place, it will be necessary to ensure that it is attractive both for inward investment and for the mobile section of the population thinking of living in the Sub-Region. This will be achieved by carefully managing demand for housing in the Sligo Sub-Region and while efforts will be made to accommodate the housing requirements of persons who are intrinsic members of the rural community, development generated by the urban centres in the Sub-Region, such as Sligo and Collooney, will be channelled towards residentially zoned and serviced land in the area covered by the Strategy.



Fourteen settlements are included in the area covered by the Sub-Regional Strategy. From north to south, these are: Grange, Carney, Drumcliff, Rathcormack, Rosses Point, Ballincar, Calry, Strandhill, Ransboro, Ballysadare, Ballintogher, Ballygawley and Collooney (see Fig. 3.c above). The Strategy examined several growth options or models and assessed the various settlements against a number of environmental, infrastructural and sustainability criteria. On this basis, it seeks to guide and direct future population growth and development into specific areas, villages and the environs of the City.

Based on the respective strengths of each settlement, future population is allocated according to a specific hierarchy, as outlined in Fig. 3.e (p. 23). This hierarchy reflects the degree to which the various settlements are able to contribute to a sustainable urban system, and will be used as a framework for the future preparation of individual land use plans.

The recommended model is shown in Fig. 3.c (p. 18). It draws heavily on the Sligo Densification Model – the compact city with satellite villages, as outlined in the Sub-Regional Strategy.

So whilst Sligo will have a network of satellite settlements, the bulk of development will be focused on Sligo City itself. This policy has been selected primarily because the key to the Sub-Region's (and indeed the County's) success is to ensure that Sligo City attains critical mass to capitalise on its gateway status. This primary goal would be hindered if a more dispersed pattern of development were chosen.

Arising from work carried out in the Sub-Regional Strategy, five key satellite settlements have been identified, namely Strandhill, Collooney, Ballysadare, Rosses Point and Grange, each of which has opportunities for consolidation. Strandhill has special significance, given the location of Sligo Regional Airport and the availability of adjacent land for enterprise and industry. It is also a satellite settlement under development pressure, within a sensitive environmental and heritage context. A statutory local area plan was adopted for the area in July 2003.

The NSS identified Collooney as having an 'urban strengthening opportunity', situated as it is at the junction of two National Primary Roads (the N4 and N17) and close to the junction of the Dublin railway line and the disused Western Rail Corridor, which may have scope for reopening in the future.

3.4.1 Policies for Sligo Sub-Region: areas under strong urban influence

- A. Promote the development of the fourteen settlements in the Sligo Sub-Region, in accordance with the settlement hierarchy outlined in Fig. 3.c (p. 18).
- B. Establish a system of 'green belt areas' or 'buffer zones' around the selected settlements, so as to restrict urban and village sprawl and the possible merging of distinctive settlement areas. These buffer zones will be determined by establishing development limits around the various settlements during the preparation of local area plans and other land use plans.
- C. Control, in accordance with the policies outlined in Section 4.2 Rural Housing, the extent of one-off housing in rural areas outside the Sub-Region's fourteen settlements. (Refer to subsection on Rural Areas Under Urban Influence.)
- D. Ensure that the sensitive coastal environments are generally maintained free from development between settlements, except where there are proposals for significant public infrastructure (i.e. roads, piers, marinas), or where significant public benefit may arise.
- E. Protect the unique landscape setting of the Sligo Sub-Region.
- F. Establish strong road connections between settlements and promote public transport strategies that could facilitate services from the sub-regional satellite villages to Sligo City.
- G. Promote compact development forms, including more comprehensive backland (in-depth) development of the Sub-Region's villages, while restricting the degree of ribbon development on their edges.
- H. Promote the refurbishment and regeneration of the centre of villages, in particular old mills, warehouses and vacant building stock.
- I. Facilitate and/or provide the infrastructure (particularly water and wastewater services) necessary to accommodate anticipated population growth.

3.5 The development of Key Support Towns to serve rural areas

In contrast to the Sligo Sub-Region, the southern and western parts of the County are characterised by:

- greater social deprivation;
- smaller households;
- lower representation of professional, managerial and technical workers;
- greater incidence of early school leavers;
- decline in the number and type of rural services, particularly sub-post offices and banks;
- lower population densities¹.



¹ Lower population densities are particularly evident in rural electoral divisions (ED) that are not contiguous to the Borough boundary. The few exceptions are the EDs that encompass the settlements of Enniscrone, Tobercurry, Ballymote and Clifony.

A concentration of new services and economic growth in selected towns to serve the south and west of the County would have the same effect as a major gateway within the region, though on a smaller scale. Accordingly, three settlements have been earmarked as Key Support Towns, in order to build on their strengths and existing scale of development, namely:

Enniscrone to serve the west of the County;

Tobercurry to serve the south-west of the County;

Ballymote to serve the south/south-east of the County.

The strategy will be to improve the range and quality of facilities and services (social and commercial) offered in these Key Support Towns, so as to provide for social inclusion, personal choice and enhanced quality of life, in terms of employment, services and community facilities. The concentration of development in the three Support Towns will also serve a diversifying local economy in the respective hinterlands. The promotion of Enniscrone, Tobercurry and Ballymote will ensure that most areas outside the Sligo Sub-Region will be within approximately fifteen miles of a Key Support Town.

More peripheral areas will continue to depend on some of the smaller villages, particularly certain upland, coastal and remote areas, and along the border with other counties. In some cases, these areas are influenced and supported by towns outside of County Sligo, notably Boyle (Co. Roscommon), Ballina (Co. Mayo) and Bundoran (Co. Donegal).

In the Key Support Towns, local enterprise will be encouraged, including the development of niche industries that may relate to locational advantage, local culture, landscape and/or amenities of the respective areas. Examples include the promotion of maritime or tourism activities in Enniscrone and the promotion of industry and enterprise in Tobercurry, which is strategically located within twenty kilometres of Knock Airport

3.6 Other strategic policy considerations

3.6.1 Integrating public transport and settlement

The promotion of Tobercurry and Ballymote as Key Support Towns, with appropriate increases in population, would also serve to reinforce the potential for a rural rail service – the development of the Western Rail Corridor and a rural/commuter rail service on the Dublin railway line (refer to subsection 8.1.2.2 Rail network). In order to support the prospect of an operational Western Rail, the Council will promote the growth of towns and villages such as Bellaghy, Tobercurry, Coolaney, Collooney and Ballysadare along the Western Rail Corridor, and Ballymote (in addition to Collooney and Ballysadare) on the Dublin–Sligo rail line.

3.6.2 Towns and villages with special functions

The Council acknowledges that several towns and villages in the County have special functions. For example, Easky, Mullaghmore, Rosses Point, Strandhill and Enniscrone play a regionally significant coastal tourism role. Other towns with regionally significant cultural roles include Gorteen and Riverstown. The Council will encourage other towns and villages to develop specialist niche activities or roles that could help to distinguish them and thereby promote their development. Such activities might relate to retirement homes/villages, local specialist foods, crafts, literary or music connections etc.

3.6.3 Developing and sustaining existing rural villages

There are numerous small villages dispersed throughout the County, particularly in the lowland areas. Most of these villages have between 100 and 300 residents, but few facilities, frequently limited to just a church, a local shop and perhaps a school or public house. Others may display a limited range of local community and commercial facilities, such as a mini-market, a service station, post office and/or pharmacy. These villages act as important focal points in the wider community or parish area. In order to maintain the current levels of service and/or to revitalise these villages, future residential development needs to be encouraged into these established settlements, especially

on infill sites, derelict sites, vacant plots and backlands. In contrast to a highly dispersed settlement pattern, a focus on existing villages can support the provision of a rural public transport service and other community facilities.

3.6.4 Sustaining rural communities

There are significant rural areas throughout the County where people live and work outside of villages and towns in a dispersed settlement pattern. In the past, these areas have been largely dependent on agriculture and farming, but with the decline of these activities and the associated population, there is a need to sustain these rural communities.

Using the rural policy framework in Section 5.3 of the NSS, the western part of the County (north and west of the N17) has been identified as a 'Rural Area with Strong Potential for Diversification'. The NSS states that the combination of upland and coastal environments is favourable for initiatives based on forestry, tourism and alternative forms of energy (particularly wind energy).

In order to properly sustain and regenerate the rural communities of County Sligo, there is a need to:

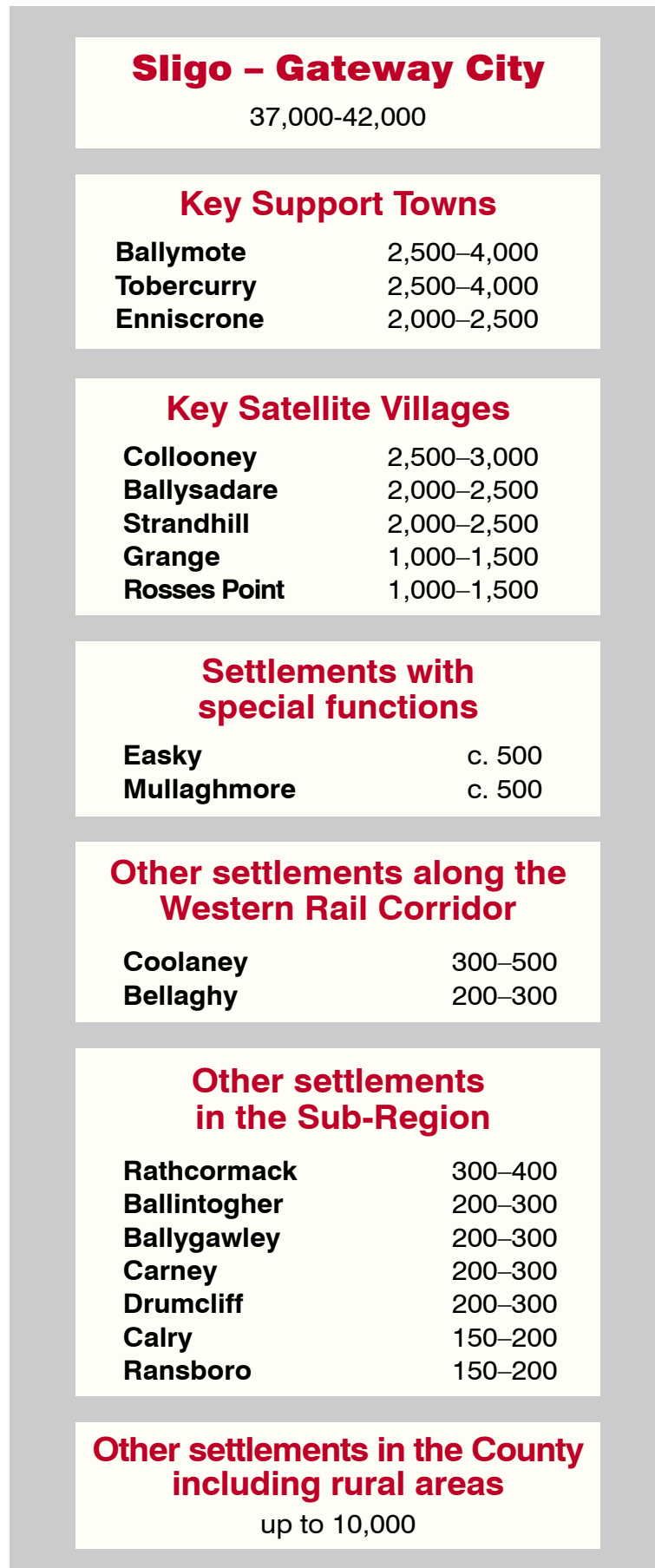
- accommodate rural-generated housing needs;
- develop alternative sources of income and enterprise;
- promote rural transport initiatives;
- promote rural tourism;
- promote the development of telecommunications in rural areas;
- encourage agricultural diversification;
- promote the development of forestry, aquaculture, mariculture, and alternative sources of energy.

Policies to facilitate these requirements are outlined in the following subsection.

3.7 Policies for the Key Support Towns and other rural settlements

- A. Promote Enniscrone, Tobercurry and Ballymote as Key Support Towns, with an appropriate range of facilities and services, including social infrastructure, retail units, commercial offices and local enterprise, to serve the rural catchments of the south and west.
- B. Support the development of enterprise space where suitable proposals are made, and particularly in each of the Key Support Towns. (See also subsection 5.4.1 Industry and enterprise objectives.)
- C. Promote the development potential of Bellaghy, Tobercurry, Coolaney, Ballymote, Collooney and Ballysadare, in order to support investment in existing rail infrastructure/services.
- D. Revitalise existing villages through the promotion of development within built-up areas (particularly on infill sites, vacant sites and on backlands), in preference to continued ribbon development on the approach roads. This will promote the efficient use of available public infrastructure and services.
- E. Work in partnership with local development and community associations, to examine ways of promoting and sustaining the character and service provisions of their towns and villages.
- F. Encourage a strong network of settlements throughout County Sligo, with good levels of accessibility at intra-county and inter-county level.
- G. Prepare, as resources permit, local area plans for those settlements identified in Schedule A (p. 24).
- H. Prepare, as resources permit, a number of 'mini-plans' (i.e. small land use plans) for those settlements identified in Schedule B (p. 24) and incorporate these into the County Development Plan through the statutory variation procedure.

Fig. 3.e Settlement hierarchy and potential population growth



Schedule A: Local area plans to be prepared

Settlement	Date of commencement
Ballymote	2005
Tobercurry	2005

Note: Local area plans have already been prepared and adopted for **Strandhill** (2003), **Enniscrone** (2004) and **Hazelwood-Ballinode** (2004).

Schedule B: Mini-plans to be prepared

Settlements	
	Dromore West
Aclare	Drumcliff
Ballincar	Easky
Ballintogher	Gorteen
Ballygawley	Mullaghmore
Banada	Ransboro
Bellaghy	Rathcormack
Carney	Riverstown
Cliffony	Rosses Point
Coolaney	Tourlestrane

Note: Mini-plans for **Ballysadare**, **Collooney** and **Grange** are included in the County Development Plan (refer to Section 11).

3.8 Special provisions for the Rosses Point Peninsula

- A. A mini-plan for Rosses Point will be prepared as soon as possible.
- B. Planning permissions for one-off housing for family members of residents of the area will be encouraged in the Cregg, Creggconnell, Kintogher, Ballyweelin and Rosses Point Road areas and planning applications in light of an area/mini-plan will not be considered premature.
- C. The site at Ballyweelin identified on the map below is zoned for residential uses.

