

Chapter 5. Housing



The core objective of housing policy is to enable every household to avail of an affordable, good-quality dwelling, suited to its needs, in a good environment and, as far as possible, at the tenure of its choice. The key challenge in this regard is the creation and maintenance of sustainable communities where people want to live and work now and into the future.

Sligo County Council's role is to formulate policies offering a range of options towards direct housing provision and assistance towards persons unable to house themselves from their own resources, to consider planning applications for private housing, and to ensure that sufficient lands are zoned to meet the projected housing demand. The Council is both the housing authority and the planning authority and, in these roles, it has the capacity to influence the supply and location of new housing within its functional area.

5.1 Existing and future housing development

County Sligo experienced a high level of residential construction between 2000 and 2008. It is particularly noteworthy that during the 2005-2007 period, house completions proved to be significantly in excess of Housing Strategy projections (see Table 5.A below). In fact, the projected cumulative total for the 2005-2011 period (5,672 units) had almost been achieved by the end of 2008 (5,521 units). Consistent with worsening economic conditions, house construction declined dramatically in 2008-2009 and this trend is set to continue in the short and medium term.

Table 5.A Housing unit projections and delivery 2005–2007 (source: www.eirestat.cso.ie)

Housing units	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
Projections*	699	705	751	799	2,954
Delivered	1,164	2,164	1,269	924	5,521
Difference	+ 465	+ 1,459	+518	+125	2,567

* As per *Sligo Borough and County Councils' Joint Housing Strategy 2005–2011*

A review of household projections, carried out as background analysis to the Sligo and Environs Development Plan in 2008, estimated that between 1,494 and 2,122 households would be in need of accommodation in the County during the 2010-2017 period.

5.1.1 Assessment of overall housing needs

Taking into account the population targets set by the Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 (refer to Section 3.1.2 Compliance with the RPG population targets and housing land requirements), it is estimated that the County Development Plan would have to cater for an additional population of circa 3,421 between 2011 and 2017, and that the Sligo and Environs area would accommodate 2,000 additional persons during the same period.

Based on the potential figure of circa 3,421 additional persons to be accommodated in County Sligo between 2011 and 2017 and an average household size of 2.2 persons per household, it would appear that circa 1,555 households will be in need of accommodation between 2011 and 2017.

5.1.2 Location of future housing

Whilst there has been no shortage in the supply of residential development in recent years, the location and distribution of this development has not been in accordance with the settlement structure envisaged in the CDP 2005-2011 and refined in this Plan (refer to Section 3.3 Settlement Structure).

In order to redress the residential balance in the County, it is essential that future residential development is permitted on the basis of a rate and location that is consistent with the Core Strategy.

This will be achieved through the application of a *plan-monitor-manage* approach to residential development. This approach involves placing appropriate controls on the extent of lands zoned for residential uses in various land-use plans, as well as monitoring housing supply through the development management process. The approach is also linked to the infrastructural capacity of each settlement.

The allocation of zoned residential land to each settlement has been done in a manner that is consistent with the Core Strategy, the Settlement Structure and the infrastructural capacity. These allocations are incorporated into mini-plans (see Volume 2 of this Plan) and will be incorporated into local area plans as part of the review of these plans.

5.1.3 The issue of density

While the housing need estimates outlined in subsection 5.1.1 above are based on modest assumptions about housing density, the Council will have regard to Government policy, which seeks to encourage more sustainable development through the avoidance of excessive suburbanisation and through the promotion of higher densities (*Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (Cities, Towns and Villages)*, DoEHLG 2009).

Accordingly, in existing settlement centres, densities of 30 to 40+ units per hectare will be encouraged. Outside centres, densities of 20-35 units per hectare will be expected, whilst lower densities of 15-20 units per hectare will be accommodated on the edge of settlements. The key issue is that each site is different and in some cases a low density may be appropriate, while in other instances a certain increase in density would be suitable (for example a courtyard development in the middle of a village or some infill sites within a village or town, where it is important to maintain the traditional streetscape).

5.1.4 Sustainable residential development

It is an aim of this Plan to promote sustainable residential development that minimises the need for the use of private cars for daily activities and that delivers a good quality of life.

Sustainable residential development should provide variety in terms of ancillary uses and supporting facilities, and should promote social integration between diverse household types and age groups.

Development should be designed to promote efficient use of land and energy, and to provide an attractive living environment which respects its context.

The approach towards future housing provision will take into account the location and context of a particular proposed development. Detailed policies regarding the future provision of housing in 30 settlements are set out in the corresponding mini-plans contained in Volume 2 of this Plan.

5.1.5 Future household sizes

Average household size in rural County Sligo, at 2.79 persons per household, was amongst the lowest in the State in 2006 and, in line with national trends, will probably continue to decrease. The revised household projections assume that the trend of falling household size will accelerate in the rural areas of the County. Over the period of the Development Plan, from 2011 to 2017, it is assumed that the average household size will decrease to approximately 2.5 persons per household. This will have implications for housing demand, with a growing need for smaller dwellings and a greater mix of house types and sizes.

A high proportion of households on the Council's Housing List have a preference for two/three-bedroom units, while elderly people or persons with special needs prefer single-bedroom units. A key objective of the Housing Strategy is the provision of a suitable range of housing types and sizes, to avoid the uniformity of suburban-type development and facilitate the integration of social and affordable housing into existing communities.

5.2 Housing Strategy

Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 requires planning authorities to prepare Housing Strategies for their areas and include these provisions in their Development Plans.

As part of the preparation of the Sligo and Environs Development Plan 2010–2016, Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council have produced a Joint Housing Strategy for the period 2010–2017. This Strategy covers the entire area of County Sligo and its provisions were largely incorporated into the Sligo County Development Plan 2011–2017.

The objectives of the Housing Strategy are fully compatible with those contained in the Regional Planning Guidelines 2010 in relation to housing. However, the economic climate and the housing market has changed dramatically since 2008, when the Strategy was prepared, and some of the estimates could appear unrealistic.

The key findings of the Housing Strategy are as follows:

- Based on a continuing decline in projected household sizes and based on population figures corresponding to the three population change scenarios (refer to Section 3.3 Settlement Structure), it is estimated that the number of additional households (i.e. in addition to the 2006 census figures) requiring accommodation in the County Development Plan area by 2020 would be between 1,301 and 3,413. For the period up to 2017, the figure would be between 1,023 and 3,259.
- It is estimated that between 2010 and 2017, the number of social and affordable housing units required in the whole County (i.e. including the Sligo and Environs area) would range between 1,342 and 2,247 under the Revised NSS-target and High-Growth scenarios, and between 1,006 and 1,680 under the Low-Growth Scenario.
- Within the County Development Plan area, social and affordable housing unit requirements during the period 2010–2017 are estimated to be from 446 to 745 under the Low-Growth Scenario, 515 to 862 under the High-Growth Scenario, and from 361 to 605 under the Revised NSS-target Scenario.
- During the period 2010 to 2017, direct social and affordable housing provision is estimated to be in the region of 600 units in total in the County Council area, subject to DoEHLG funding arrangements.
- The spatial distribution of housing development anticipated by the CDP 2005-2011 has not been realised. There has been an over-concentration of housing in satellite villages, Key Support Towns, and several rural settlements at the expense of Sligo City. The key drivers of this trend have been disparities in developable land supply, land values, development incentives and land zoning controls.
- In Sligo County as a whole, land zoning should be based upon the Settlement Structure, with the Gateway City of Sligo given priority for future development.

Strategic housing policies

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

- SP-HOU-1** Encourage a balanced supply of private housing in the county, in a manner that is consistent with the Core Strategy and the Settlement Structure, and which will support the creation of sustainable communities through the provision of an appropriate range of housing types and high-quality residential environments.
- SP-HOU-2** Reserve 20% of eligible sites which are subject to new residential development (or a mix of uses including residential) for the development of social and affordable units, in accordance with the Housing Strategy and the requirements of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000.
- SP-HOU-3** Ensure that the needs of older people, people with disabilities and other special-needs persons and households are adequately catered for in new developments.

Strategic housing objectives

It is an objective of Sligo County Council to:

- SO-HOU-1** Implement the relevant provisions of the Sligo City and County Joint Housing Strategy 2010-2017.
- SO-HOU-2** Continue to monitor the extent of residential development in the county area to ensure that sufficient land is zoned to accommodate housing demand over the Plan period.
- SO-HOU-3** Ensure that 20% of all sites eligible for Part V is reserved for the development of new social and affordable residential units.
- SO-HOU-4** Continue with the programme of refurbishment and regeneration of existing local authority housing stock.
- SO-HOU-5** Establish a register of eligible households interested in acquiring affordable housing.



General housing policies

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

- GP-HOU-1** Have regard to the principle of sequential development in assessing all new residential development proposals, whereby areas closer to settlement centres will be prioritised for development in advance of lands further from settlement centres. Notwithstanding this principle, each proposal will be considered on its merits and having regard to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
- GP-HOU-2** Require high quality and innovation in the layout and design of new residential development, particularly with regard to:
- environmental sustainability and energy efficiency;
 - site/internal layouts that may incorporate live/work units and/or home zones;
- GP-HOU-3** Ensure the provision of a suitable range of house types and sizes to facilitate the changing demographic structure and in particular the increasing trend towards smaller household sizes. In private housing schemes, the following mix of house types should generally apply:
- | House type | Proportion in the scheme |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| 1-2 bedrooms | minimum 30% of total no. of houses |
| 3 bedrooms | minimum 30% of total no. of houses |
| 4+ bedrooms | maximum 20% of total no. of houses |
- GP-HOU-4** Promote more compact forms of residential development, such as infill and backland development, and ensure – through the development management process – that access points to backland areas are reserved or that adequate road frontage is reserved to provide future road access, to enable comprehensive backland development.
- GP-HOU-5** Ensure that services and utilities in residential developments are provided concurrently with the construction of new dwellings.
- GP-HOU-6** Ensure that all apartment and mixed-use developments provide for estate management so as to preserve the amenity, quality and visual character of the development, to ensure adequate maintenance of common facilities and areas, and encourage tenant involvement and participation in estate management. (Refer also to the Development Management Standards Chapter of this Plan).
- GP-HOU-7** Promote higher densities of residential development in appropriate locations and circumstances, having regard to the principles outlined in the DoEHLG's *Guidelines for Planning Authorities – Sustainable residential development in urban areas*.
- GP-HOU-8** Ensure that new housing development in towns and villages is of appropriate scale, layout and quality design, and that it relates to the character and form of the settlement.
- GP-HOU-9** Ensure that all new multiple housing development proposals, including apartments and mixed-use developments, provide adequate facilities for the storage, separation and collection of waste (organic, recyclable and landfill waste) and ensure the ongoing operation of these facilities.

General housing objective

It is an objective of Sligo County Council to:

- GO-HOU-1** Monitor and manage the extent of existing and permitted residential development to ensure that it is consistent with the Settlement Structure and the infrastructural capacity of each settlement.

5.3 Social and affordable housing



Culfadda



Tourlestrane



Enniscrone



Coolaney

Social and affordable housing schemes in County Sligo

In addition to private sector provision, housing needs can be met from a variety of sources, including local authority development and the voluntary and co-operative housing sector under an array of different tenure and contract forms.

The Housing Strategy seeks to ensure that housing is available for people with different levels of income and includes an estimate of the amount of social, affordable and voluntary housing required in County Sligo. A large proportion of households were considered unable to meet their accommodation needs at the time of preparing the Strategy (2008-2009), due to the economic downturn and limited access to credit.

The Housing Strategy estimates the requirements for social and affordable housing based on available data on income distribution, expectations regarding household income change, house prices and mortgage interest rates. Taken together, these factors determine the number and proportion of new households who will require social or affordable housing. Whilst the volatility of economic conditions since 2008 renders any such analysis extremely challenging, the results of the calculations and associated sensitivity analysis consistently indicated that in excess of 20% (in some cases rising to 43%) of households will require social and affordable housing. In the CDP area, this would represent a requirement of between 446 and 862 social and affordable housing units during the 2010-2017 period.

At the end of November 2009, there were already approximately 466 households on the Council's Housing List, of which over half had a location preference. Demand is spread throughout the County but is particularly high in Collooney, Ballysadare and Strandhill.

Local authorities are required to prepare comprehensive multi-annual plans for the delivery of social and affordable housing programmes, in line with national policy and social partnership agreements. These multi-annual plans also deal with the regeneration, refurbishment, maintenance and management of the existing local authority housing stock and address provision by the voluntary and co-operative housing sector.

Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council have prepared a Social and Affordable Housing Action Plan 2004-2008. The Action Plan is reviewed periodically, in conjunction with the DoEHLG, and brought in

line with achievable targets and available budgets. Because of funding shortages, it is expected that the annual completion and output rates will be reduced, despite increasing numbers applying for inclusion on the Housing List. The figures indicate that there will be a significant shortfall in the supply of social and affordable housing by the County Council. Some of the difference will have to be made up through the provision of housing under the leasing arrangements introduced in 2009.

Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended in 2002) is another means through which the Council can provide social and affordable housing. In accordance with Part V of the Act, it is the policy of Sligo County Council to require 20% of all land zoned for residential uses (or for a mix of residential and other uses) to be reserved for the purpose of social and affordable housing (refer to Section 5.1 and the Strategic Housing Policies).

Given that almost every settlement in the County is now covered by a land-use plan, there is potential for the role of Part V to expand, subject to growth in residential development. Prior to commencement of any development permitted under the terms of Part V, applicants will be required to enter into an agreement with the County Council.

Local authority housing is well distributed throughout the County. Over the period of the Plan, the provision of further social and affordable housing may be considered on Council-owned lands depending on needs, funding and on approvals obtained from the DoEHLG. The Council recognises the need to avoid concentration of new social housing in any particular area, especially adjoining existing social housing estates. The Council will have regard to this concern in dealing with all new housing development proposals.

In line with government policy, Sligo County Council will work to deliver more and better quality housing responses in a more strategic way that is focused on building sustainable communities.

Social and affordable housing policies

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

- P-SA-HOU-1** Promote social inclusion by ensuring that social and affordable housing is well distributed throughout all residential areas rather than concentrated in a few locations.
- P-SA-HOU-2** Ensure that development in areas subject to an agreement under Section 96 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 is integrated with the rest of the development, so as to avoid undue social segregation.
- P-SA-HOU-3** Ensure that the supply of housing units under the Housing Strategy reflects the current and anticipated demographic characteristics and household sizes.
- P-SA-HOU-4** Encourage linkages between existing public and private housing areas through the provision of shared facilities, services and pedestrian/cycle and vehicular connections, as appropriate, between these areas.
- P-SA-HOU-5** Where a particular need is identified, provide housing schemes designed for the needs of older people and/or those with special needs. Otherwise, housing schemes shall be designed with a suitable mix of house types and designs which can be easily adapted to accommodate special housing needs.

Social and affordable housing objective

It is an objective of Sligo County Council to:

- O-SA-HOU-1** Prepare and implement an updated Social and Affordable Housing Action Plan to address direct housing provision and assistance towards housing provision.

5.4 Traveller accommodation

The 2006 Census recorded a total of 128 families (319 persons) living in temporary housing units in County Sligo. The 2008 assessment of Traveller accommodation needs carried out within Sligo County and Borough indicated that there were approximately 87 Traveller families living within the County at the time.

Sligo County Council recognises the distinct culture and lifestyle of the Traveller community and will endeavour to provide suitable accommodation for Travellers who are indigenous to the area, using the full range of housing options available, such as standard lettings in local authority estates, lettings in voluntary housing schemes, group housing schemes, halting sites, single/stand-alone housing where required etc. Working with the Traveller community, its representative organisations and local communities, the Council will seek to ensure an equitable distribution of Traveller facilities throughout the Plan area.

A new Traveller Accommodation Programme has been adopted for the period 2009–2013.

Traveller accommodation policies

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

- P-TA-HOU-1** Provide for the accommodation needs of Travellers, as far as is reasonable and practicable, using the full range of housing options available to the Local Authorities and having regard to the policies outlined in the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009–2013.
- P-TA-HOU-2** Consider the submissions of Travellers, their representative organisations and those of the local communities in relation to the siting, planning and design of prospective halting sites or group housing schemes, so as to avoid social conflict and promote social inclusion.
- P-TA-HOU-3** Provide and manage halting sites in a manner compatible with the local environment and the needs of the travelling community, based on management plans set up in co-operation with Traveller families. Halting sites will be subject to the detailed design standards as outlined in the Department of the Environment's *Guidelines for Residential Caravan Parks for Travellers* (October 1997), and normal development management standards.

Traveller accommodation objectives

It is an objective of Sligo County Council to:

- O-TA-HOU-1** Provide appropriate accommodation to meet the needs of Travellers through the implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009–2012 and the Joint Housing Strategy.
- O-TA-HOU-2** Provide Traveller Accommodation at Collooney, Tobercurry, Cloonamahon (existing site to be redeveloped) and Ballyfree (existing site to be redeveloped).

5.5 Voluntary and cooperative housing

Voluntary and cooperative housing provision is increasingly becoming a strong feature in the delivery of accommodation nationally. A marked feature of the voluntary sector is that many associations also offer related, non-housing services such as social activities, welfare advice and estate management skills. Although delivery in Sligo has been modest to date, the Council will continue to involve the voluntary and cooperative housing sector in the provision of social housing in their functional areas. Discussions are ongoing regarding existing and future proposals, particularly regarding the provision of housing to meet special needs categories.

Voluntary and cooperative housing policy

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

P-VC-HOU-1 Assist voluntary and non-profit cooperative housing associations in the provision of housing and encourage a more active involvement of these sectors in the housing market.

5.6 Special-needs housing

Sligo County Council recognises the need to accommodate the housing requirements of those with special needs and those in particular circumstances. The type and location of accommodation for persons with special needs will be assessed in line with current thinking and practice.

5.6.1 Older people

The aging of the population poses strategic challenges for society in general, and particularly for the development of responsive health and social policies. As a key social policy area, housing is a function that must adapt in order to meet the needs of a growing number of older people. The Council will work with various bodies/agencies and the private sector to facilitate suitable proposals for the accommodation of older people.

5.6.2 Accommodation for persons with special needs

Where the housing requirements of such persons are identified, these needs can be met by direct provision of accommodation by the County Council or in conjunction with the HSE or the voluntary sector. In line with national policy, the Council implements grant schemes that provide financial assistance in carrying out works to render dwellings more suitable for occupants with special needs. Subject to funding, the Council will continue to implement these schemes.

5.6.3 Accommodating homeless persons

The DoEHLG has published a new Homeless Strategy 2008–2013. On the basis of the Strategy's recommendations, Sligo Homeless Forum, together with other voluntary and statutory bodies, has prepared an Action Plan on Homelessness in Sligo 2009–2011. The plan is based on an independent review of the current situation and aims to address gaps and challenges identified, while building on existing strengths.

5.6.4 Refugees

Persons who have been granted refugee status have automatic rights to apply for local authority housing. Consideration should be given in this regard to household size and structure, and the need for access to social supports in terms of language, education and employment.

Special needs housing policy

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

- P-SN-HOU-1** Continue to support independent living for older people and the provision of specific, purpose-built accommodation.
- P-SN-HOU-2** Continue to meet the housing needs of persons with special needs both by direct provision of accommodation and by facilitating the provision of housing by the voluntary sector.
- P-SN-HOU-3** Continue to implement the following grant schemes: Housing Adaption Grant for People with Disability, Mobility Aids Grant and Housing Aid for Older People Scheme.
- P-SN-HOU-4** Promote a partnership approach between the HSE, disability interest groups, voluntary housing associations and the local authority in meeting the particular needs of people with disabilities and the elderly.
- P-SN-HOU-5** Facilitate the provision of suitable accommodation for the homeless and for those in need of emergency accommodation.
- P-SN-HOU-6** Implement the provisions of DoEHLG's Homeless Strategy 2008–2013 and the Action Plan on Homelessness in Sligo 2009-2011.
- P-SN-HOU-7** Ensure that housing developments accommodating the elderly, the disabled and the households least likely to own cars have easy and convenient access to local facilities and to public transport.
- P-SN-HOU-8** Support proposals for the provision of sheltered housing and work with the various bodies / organisations responsible for provision of this type of accommodation.

5.7 Rural housing

Government policy on rural housing is set out in the National Spatial Strategy and the document *Sustainable Rural Housing – Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (DOEHLG, April 2005). The rural settlement policy framework contained in the NSS aims to sustain and renew established rural communities, while strengthening the structure of smaller settlements to support local economies. In this way, key assets of rural areas are protected in order to support quality of life, and rural settlement policies are responsive to differing local circumstances.

Sligo County Council acknowledges that there is a long tradition of people living in rural areas in County Sligo. The Council also acknowledges that there are extensive rural areas throughout the County, where people continue to live in a highly dispersed settlement pattern. In the past, these areas were largely dependent on agriculture and farming. With the decline of such activities, there has been an associated decline in the rural population. In these areas, it is accepted that there is a need to sustain rural communities, and therefore a less restrictive policy on one-off housing will apply.

In formulating policy on rural housing, the Council will consider whether a proposal is classed as rural-generated housing or urban-generated housing, as defined in subsections 5.7.2 and 5.7.3 of this Plan.

5.7.1 Rural housing strategy

The Settlement Structure (Section 3.3) highlighted the fact that there are parts of County Sligo which have been subject to significant development pressure (principally within the Sligo City Sub-Region) and other areas that have experienced depopulation and are in need of regeneration. Whilst these two distinct types of area require a different policy response, it will remain the policy of the Council to accommodate genuine rural-generated housing need throughout the County.

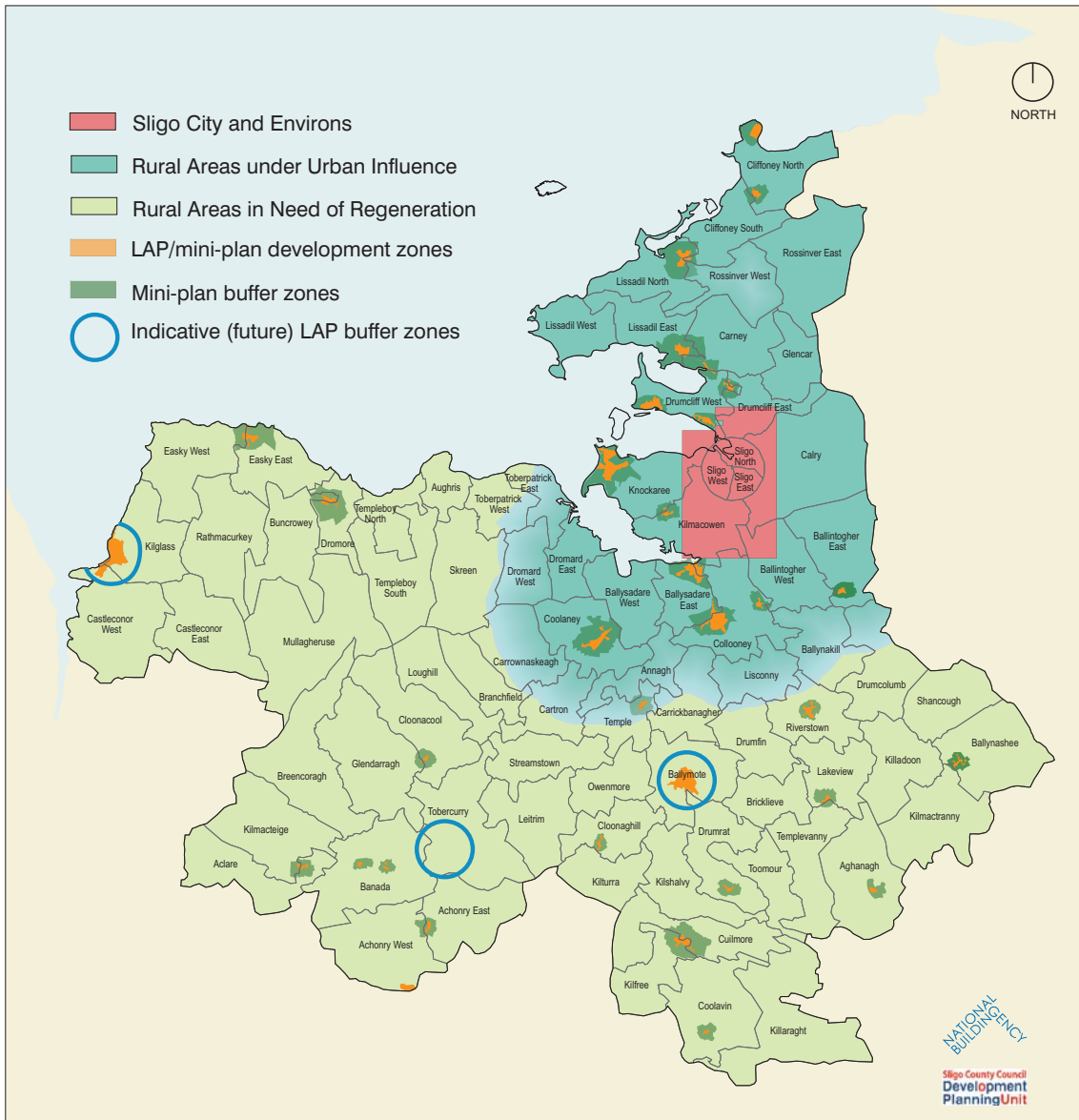


Fig. 5.B Rural housing policy areas in County Sligo

It is the policy of the County Council to consider proposals for rural housing under two broad categories, as set out below.

Rural Areas in Need of Regeneration

In general, one-off housing (urban-generated and rural-generated) will be facilitated in areas that have experienced depopulation and are in need of regeneration. This policy does not extend to sites located in the buffer zones of Key Support Towns and other settlements or their approach roads. The overall aim here is to maintain rural communities and associated services.

Rural Areas Under Urban Influence

In general, one-off housing will be discouraged in areas that have experienced significant development pressure/population growth in the period 1991-2010, except for cases of rural-generated housing need (refer to subsection 5.7.3 below). The aim here is to manage the pressure of urban-generated housing in the Sligo City Subregion and in those areas that are considered to be under urban influence, while facilitating rural-generated housing need. This policy will ensure ease of access for local people to affordable sites.

The Rural Areas in Need of Regeneration and Rural Areas Under Urban Influence are broadly outlined on the Rural Housing Policy Map (Fig. 5.B). Proposals for rural housing in or near the general boundary or interface of these zones will be considered on their merits, having regard to the existing pattern and intensity of development and the absorption capacity of the landscape.

The need for the distinction between the two types of rural area is important, as the Council remains committed to Sligo's Gateway status and the need to attain critical mass, thereby defusing the pressure for additional housing in rural areas close to Sligo City and Environs. Additional housing needs should generally be accommodated within the Sligo Borough and Environs area, satellite settlements, Key Support Towns and other settlements where sufficient growth opportunity exists.

5.7.2 Rural-generated housing

Rural-generated housing is defined as the housing needed by:

- a. persons whose primary employment is in a rural-based activity with a demonstrated genuine need to live in the locality of that employment base, for example, those working in agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, horticulture or other natural resource-based employment and who can demonstrate that they have been engaged in this employment for over five years;
- b. persons who have no family lands but who wish to build their first home in the area, on a site within a 5-km radius of their original family home, within the rural community in which they have spent a substantial and continuous part of their lives;
- c. persons with a vital link to the rural community in which they wish to reside, by reason of having lived in this community for a minimum period of seven years or by the existence in this community of long-established ties with family members;
- d. persons who are required to live in a rural area for exceptional reasons, including health reasons. Such applications must be accompanied by a specialist's report and recommendation outlining the reasons why it is necessary for the applicant to live in a rural area. The application should also be supported by a relevant disability organisation of which the applicant is a member, where applicable.

In applying sympathetic consideration to bona fide farmers, emigrants returning to their place of origin and applicants claiming exceptional circumstances (other than those outlined above), the overriding concern of the Council will be the resultant net community benefit accruing to an area by permitting further residential development.

The Council will endeavour to accommodate rural-generated housing in Rural Areas Under Urban Influence and Rural Areas in Need of Regeneration. Housing in buffer zones around settlements will be accommodated subject to objective 13.8.E in Chapter 13 Mini-plans - general policies (Volume 2 of this Plan).

5.7.3 Urban-generated housing

This is defined as housing in rural areas sought by those living and working in urban areas; it includes second and holiday homes. Frequently, this type of housing takes the form of ribbon and/or sporadic development along the approach roads to larger settlements and low-density development in scenic locations. The Council will endeavour to accommodate urban-generated housing within the development limits of all towns and villages and in Rural Areas in Need of Regeneration. This approach has been adopted because of the problems that arise from a proliferation of one-off houses, including those listed below:

- creation of demands for the subsequent provision of public infrastructure (i.e. roads and utilities);
- proliferation of septic tanks in areas with poor soils that do not have the capacity to absorb effluent;
- contamination of local water supplies and a reduction in water quality;
- rising land values that push up prices for those with a genuine local housing need;
- higher energy consumption and transportation costs arising from increased car-based commuting;
- profound effects on landscape character, with potentially harmful effects on the tourism sector, which depends on high-quality landscapes;
- loss of investment in rural towns and villages, leading to dereliction and vacancy;
- relocation of younger and more affluent people from settlements to the surrounding rural areas.

5.7.4 Rural housing design and development patterns

New development in rural areas should be absorbed and integrated successfully into the rural setting, i.e. development should harmonise or 'read' with the existing traditional pattern of development and not intrude on unspoilt landscapes.

High standards of location, siting and design should be satisfied in order to achieve this objective (see Sections 12.3.20, 12.3.21 and 12.3.22 for further guidance in this regard).

The practical achievement of well integrated rural housing development requires considerable skill and experience in site assessment and detailed design. It requires an ability to examine a site in the context of its natural and built surroundings and analyse whether the site is capable of carrying the proposed development without being unduly dominant on either the surrounding landscape or pattern of development.

As a general principle, it is better to design on a modest basis rather than design for maximum public visibility or 'intrusion' in terms of building form and detailing.

In the main, ribbon development and urban sprawl in the countryside will be discouraged.

Ribbon development means frontage development along a road where there is no tandem development in the backlands, for example five or more houses on any one side of a given 250 metres of road. It is undesirable because it creates numerous accesses onto traffic routes, sterilises backlands, landlocks farmland, creates servicing problems (e.g. water supply, drainage, footpaths, street lighting) and intrudes on public views of the rural setting.



Ribbon development: frontage development along a road with no tandem development in the backlands



Urban sprawl: unplanned development expansion along the roads out of towns and villages



Traditionally, rural housing made use of trees, hedges, setbacks and natural contours for successful absorption

Urban sprawl means unplanned development expansion along the roads out of towns and villages, whether or not in ribbon form. It gives rise to the same problems associated with ribboning, but may have an even greater visual impact and transform the character of the adjacent settlement.

However, in certain circumstances, especially where ribbon development is substantially in place and where additional housing will effectively consolidate the ribbon, infill development may be permissible.

Similarly, where urban sprawl can be 'rounded off' or significantly ordered through careful siting of new development, such development may be permissible.

Whilst ribbon development and urban sprawl will be discouraged, applications for single houses will be assessed according to their capacity to be absorbed into the

landscape without creating a disproportionate visual impact or giving rise to significant traffic or environmental impact. Visual impact will be assessed according to the landscape designations indicated on the Landscape Characterisation Map (refer to Fig. 7.C in Section 7.4 Protecting Landscape Character). The Council will generally discourage new rural housing in designated Sensitive Rural Landscapes, Visually Vulnerable Areas, in coastal zones and along designated Scenic Routes.

5.7.5 Replacement and refurbishment of derelict houses

The Council will facilitate the restoration of derelict houses in the countryside and sympathetic consideration will be given to proposals to provide replacement dwellings. This policy applies to both rural-generated and urban-generated housing. In the case of both derelict and replacement houses, design proposals should generally reflect the scale, character and external finishes of the derelict/replacement house.



Restoration of derelict houses will be facilitated

Where it is proposed to replace or restore an existing dwelling house, the house to be replaced or restored should be clearly recognisable as a dwelling house. In any such case the essential characteristics of a house (i.e. external walls, roof, and openings) must be substantially intact and the structure, when last used, must have been used as a dwelling. In assessing the condition of such structures, the planning authority will disregard any recent structural works carried out as an attempt to comply with the above requirements.

New houses permitted under this policy should be constructed on the site of the house to be replaced – i.e. replacement in situ – except in circumstances where a setback is required in order to improve vehicular access or where alternative siting would be preferable in the interests of visual amenity, public health or orderly development.

Rural housing policies (I)

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

- P-RHOU-1** Ensure that, in permitting one-off rural housing, key rural assets such as water quality, natural and cultural heritage and landscape quality are respected and protected.
- P-RHOU-2** Encourage the renovation and reuse of existing derelict rural properties and consider proposals for replacement dwelling houses on their merits. These properties should generally be intact and exhibit the essential characteristics of a dwelling house as outlined in subsection 5.7.5 of this Plan. The location, siting and design of any such proposal shall also reflect those of the existing property.

[continues on the next page]

Rural housing policies (II)

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

- P-RHOU-3** Facilitate rural-generated housing in all areas of the County, while providing for urban-generated housing in Rural Areas in Need of Regeneration, subject to the policy considerations set out below:
- a. Control of ribbon development, especially close to Key Support Towns and other settlements.
 - b. Control of rural housing in the coastal zone, especially between coastal roads and the sea.
 - c. Protection of designated heritage sites, such as proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs), candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).
 - d. Protection of the integrity of designated Visually Vulnerable areas, Sensitive Rural Landscapes and Scenic Routes (see the Landscape Characterisation Map - Fig. 7.C in Section 7.4 of this Plan).
 - e. Protection of key natural assets, such as surface and ground water and aggregate or mineral reserves.
 - f. Ensuring the safe operation of key transport arteries, particularly national primary and secondary roads and the rail network. Access to national roads shall be restricted in accordance with DoEHLG's *Draft Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (June 2010).
 - g. Ensuring that physical planning standards are met – e.g. soil conditions suitable for effluent disposal, availability of a suitable and reliable water supply, adequate flood control/avoidance measures. All proposed on-site wastewater treatment systems shall comply with the EPA document *Code of practice for Wastewater Treatment and disposal Systems serving Single Houses* (2009).
 - h. Incorporation of existing natural and heritage features into the development, e.g. tree stands, significant hedgerows, stone walling, wetlands and streams.
 - i. Minimising the visual impact of the development on the surrounding landscape by ensuring that normal siting, layout and design criteria are met – e.g. avoid visually prominent sites, design the dwelling house to integrate appropriately with its landscape context, include screening and landscaping proposals.
 - j. Ensuring that the scale, bulk and massing of the proposed development is in keeping with existing developments in the area
 - k. Encouraging innovative design, provided it does not dominate its setting or alter the character of the landscape.
 - l. Promotion of building layouts that maximise the potential for solar gain and wind protection.
 - m. Ensuring that there is adequate infrastructure to service the development.
 - n. Ensuring that the road network is adequate to cater for the development, that safe vehicular access is available and that the traffic movements generated by the development will not give rise to traffic hazard.
 - o. In granting permission for one-off rural housing, the Council is insistent that it will not provide public services, such as footpaths, public lighting, water or sewerage connections where they do not already exist.
 - p. Where hedgerows forming roadside boundaries are required to be removed for safety reasons, they should be reinstated on the new boundary line, in order to insure the continuity of wildlife corridors.

5.8 Holiday homes and second homes

Managing the provision of tourism accommodation is essential to ensuring the delivery of a sustainable tourism strategy. As outlined in Section 4.4, much of Sligo's tourism product is based upon its natural scenery, heritage and landscapes. Therefore, in the interests of protecting the rural environment and the economic provision of services and facilities, demand for holiday homes and second homes should be accommodated in serviced settlements only, and particularly in Easkey, Mullaghmore, Rosses Point, Strandhill and Enniscrone, designated "settlements with special functions", which play a regionally significant coastal tourism role. It is unlikely that other settlements in the county will experience a high demand for such developments, but any such case should be restricted to small-scale development only.



Holiday accommodation in Enniscrone

While the provision of such accommodation within existing settlements can contribute to the local economy, it might result in local people being priced out of the property market. It can also put increased pressure on local infrastructure. Therefore there is a need to ensure there is a sustainable balance between the number of holiday/second homes and the number of permanent residences. Ongoing monitoring of the supply of holiday homes will therefore be carried out by the planning authority in order to ensure that an appropriate balance is maintained.

It is sometimes unclear whether a particular development is to be used as holiday/second homes or as permanent housing. This makes quantification of holiday home provision difficult. In the interests of clarity, all such future proposals will be required to submit additional details regarding tenure, management etc.

Holiday / second homes policies

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

- P-HHOU-1** Direct proposals for holiday homes and second homes into existing serviced settlements, particularly into Easkey, Mullaghmore, Rosses Point, Strandhill and Enniscrone.
- P-HHOU-2** Ensure that an appropriate balance is maintained between the number of holiday/second homes and the number of permanent homes within each settlement with special functions.
- P-HHOU-3** Ensure that the total amount of holiday or second home developments permitted in any other settlement is limited in scale to maximum 10% of the number of permanently-occupied houses.
- P-HHOU-4** Require, where appropriate, through the development management process, the submission of precise details regarding the intentions for tenure and management of potential holiday/second home developments.

Holiday / second homes objective

It is an objective of Sligo County Council to:

- O-HHOU-1** Establish baseline data on the number of holiday/second homes and the number of permanent homes in relevant settlements and continue to carry out monitoring of this data throughout the plan period.

5.9 Vacant housing

The 2006 Census recorded that approximately one house in four (23.1%, including holiday homes) in County Sligo was vacant on Census night in April 2006, compared to a national average of 15% and an EU average of just 7%. Survey work carried out in 30 settlements (all the settlements covered by Volume 2 of this Plan) by County Council planners in 2009 also recorded a high average vacancy rate of approximately 15% (it should be noted that the survey did not include presumed holiday homes within the vacancy rate).

The numerous vacant houses in many villages, in sometimes unfinished developments, detract from the vitality and amenity of the settlements and can even encourage antisocial behaviour.

As discussed in Chapter 3 Core Strategy, a *plan-monitor-manage* approach to housing provision should help to reduce vacancy rates. In the meantime, the Council will strive, through available enforcement mechanisms, to ensure that housing developments and associated services/facilities are completed in accordance with the terms of relevant planning permissions.

A flexible and supportive approach will also be adopted towards alternative uses for existing vacant residential units or other types of buildings. A wide range of potential uses – including community facilities, commercial, retail, enterprise, arts etc. – will be considered in such cases. The key consideration is that any such prospective development must be of an appropriate scale and must be compatible with existing and proposed surrounding uses. It should also be appropriately designed and should demonstrate compliance with all other relevant development management standards.

Vacant housing policies

It is the policy of Sligo County Council to:

- P-VHOU-1** Adopt a flexible and supportive approach towards alternative uses of vacant residential units/buildings, subject to appropriate scale, design and compatibility with existing and proposed surrounding uses.
- P-VHOU-2** Strive to ensure – through the enforcement process – that housing developments and associated services and facilities are completed to a standard that is in accordance with the terms of the relevant planning permission.

Vacant housing objectives

It is an objective of Sligo County Council to:

- O-VHOU-1** Establish baseline data on the number of vacant residential units in each settlement in the CDP area and continue to carry out monitoring of vacancy throughout the plan period.