

PART THREE: DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT STANDARDS

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3.1 URBAN AND RESIDENTIAL STANDARDS

Conversion of Existing Houses to Flat Accommodation

In general there is a presumption in favour of retaining houses suited for family accommodation in their original undivided form and where large family residences are the predominant urban form.

Subdivision of houses into a number of smaller units will only be acceptable in areas which are characterised by large houses on relatively extensive sites where populations are generally falling, which are well served by public transport and where subdivision into a number of units would not result in a dramatic alteration to the character of the area and provided that the original premises are more than 1,200 sq. ft. (111.48 sq.m.) (net floor area) excluding any garages or more than 1,400 sq. ft. (130 sq. m.) (net floor area) where they form part of a terrace.

The subdivision of housing above business premises and housing on primary traffic routes within urban areas may also be permitted.

In all instances the standard of development provided should satisfy the following criteria:

- The minimum size of unit is 45 square metres or more.
- The internal space and design standards are acceptable.
- Flats are self-contained or, when this is not possible, have at least one bathroom and toilet for every two units, or one for every floor of a house.
- Kitchen facilities shall be provided in each unit.
- Sound insulation is installed to alleviate the problems of noise both between the new residential units and between them and neighbouring dwellings, and sound insulation and ventilation treatment against road and railway noise is installed on noise sensitive facades.
- Adequate, safe and secure access to all dwellings is provided.
- Those intended for families are provided on the ground floor or have direct access to a garden.
- Adequate parking is provided and the parking is not provided at the expense of garden or courtyard areas necessary for amenity purposes.
- Car parking in the surrounding grounds is dealt with sensitively, extensive parking areas to the front of the building line will be resisted.
- Each flat has a refuse bin storage area to accommodate three bins, household waste, recyclable materials and a brown bin.
- Each flat has washing/drying facilities which are suitably accessible to the occupants of that unit and well designed.
- Any extensions or additions are limited to an appropriate size and meet with the council's design standards.

Extensions and Alterations to Dwellings

Extensions to existing dwellings will be assessed in terms of impact on existing adjacent residential amenity and the design approach.

Impact to residential amenity can result from over-shadowing, loss of light and loss of outlook or from loss of privacy resulting from over looking. Extensions will not be permitted where they result in negative impact to adjacent residential amenity.

In terms of design, care should be taken to ensure that the design satisfies the following criteria.

- Follows the pattern of the existing building as much as possible.
- Is constructed with similar finishes and with similar window arrangements to the existing building so that they integrate better with it.
- Elevational detailing should match that of the host structure.
- In the case of an extension to the side of a house, be set back at least 150mm from the front wall of the existing house to give a more satisfactory appearance.

- In some circumstances a gap of 1m to be retained between it and the neighbouring dwelling so as to prevent dwellings which were intended to be detached from becoming a terrace.
- Have a pitched roof, particularly when visible from the public road or when the building is two or three storeys high. The traditional ridged roof is likely to cause fewer problems in the future rather than flat ones.
- Dormer extensions should not obscure the main features of the existing roof, i.e. should not break the ridge or eaves lines of the roof. Box dormers should be avoided.
- Front dormers should normally be set back at least three-tile courses from the eaves line and should be clad in a material matching the existing roof.
- Proposed side extensions must retain side access to the rear of the property where possible.

The Planning Authority will produce a Supplementary Planning Guidance Note relating to house extensions and conversion and sub-division of existing houses during the term of the Plan.

Density

The Planning Authority will have regard to the 'Residential Density Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (DoEHLG; 1999) as a basis for the assessment of proposals. More specific recommendations may be adopted in Action Area Plans.

Higher densities will be considered in respect of all sites, but particularly those developments in excess of 0.5 hectares (c1.23 acres). When considering proposals for housing developments the Council will give first priority to securing a good environment for residents, having regard both to the individual characteristics of the site and the character of the surrounding area. Subject to this, development should make the best use of land and new dwellings should be constructed at an appropriate density.

In some special circumstances, e.g. in areas of environmental or architectural merit, the appropriate density may need to be lower. It will not be necessary to match adjacent densities except in very small infill situations. However higher density will require higher quality.

Site Coverage

will be applied in the interests of achieving a more sustainable use of inner urban/town centre land. In order to prevent adverse effects of over-development in inner urban locations site coverage of between 70% and 80% would be appropriate. However, flexibility will be applied in the interests of achieving a more sustainable use of inner urban/town centre land.

Plot Ratio

Plot ratio is defined as the gross floor area of buildings on a site divided by the gross site area and is used to depict the intensity of use on the site. In calculating the area of site adjoining road widths are excluded. The following range of indicative plot ratios is recommended :

Town Centre/Brownfield; 1.0-2.5

Inner Suburban; 0.5 -1.0

Outer suburban:

Close proximity to public transport; 0.35-0.5

Remote from public transport; 0.25-0.35

Design

Development proposals must exhibit a high quality of architectural design and layout in order to achieve a high quality living environment. All housing developments will be accessed in both quantitative and qualitative terms as to whether they demonstrate the key elements of good urban design and meet prescribed standards. This may be summarised as follows:

<u>Qualitative Criteria</u>	<u>Quantitative Criteria</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safety - Privacy - Sense of identity - Variety - Functionalism - Convenience - Access for the disabled - Overall aesthetics incorporating hard and soft landscaping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Density - Site sizes - Public open space provision - Recreational open space - Play areas, etc.

Privacy and Enclosure

In order to achieve adequate privacy and open areas between houses in new residential development the normal minimum rear garden space shall be not less than 10 metres depth. This should be measured to the rearmost wall of the house and should not extend less than the full width of the house. As it is appreciated that this standard may not be readily complied with on all occasions, discretion will be employed where a side garden of equal or greater dimensions can be substituted for rear garden space and where the building design provides for the achievement of privacy.

Where a front boundary wall or fencing is provided, the design and materials shall be such as to provide a pleasing design feature to the overall housing layout.

Rear boundary walls or fences shall be constructed to a height of not less than 1.8 metres. Permanent screening of a similar height should also be provided between the gardens of adjoining houses for a minimum distance of 2.5 metres behind the rear of the house.

Over-looking

In general there should be distance of 22m between opposing rear first floor windows. Innovative dwelling types, such as single aspect houses, which have their main sleeping and living areas on one side and circulation and bathrooms on the other can be closer. These housing forms create more of an intimate village form. Where developments are proposed in existing residential areas a distance of 35m or greater is required in the case of overlooking living room windows and balconies.

Any window proposed at ground floor level shall not be less than 1 metre from the boundary it faces.

Over-shadowing

This will be problem with significantly high buildings or when new buildings are located close to adjoining structures. Daylight and shadow projection diagrams should be submitted for such proposals. The recommendations of 'Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight: A Guide to Good Practice', (B.R.E. 1991) or B.S. 8026 'Lighting for Buildings, Part 2 1992: Code of Practice for Day lighting' should be followed in this regard.

Private Open Space for Houses

All houses (terraced, semi-detached, detached) should have an area of private open space behind the building line, in accordance with the standards detailed in the following table.

Table 10 Private Open Space for Houses

Accommodation size	Min private open area
1-2 bedrooms	48m ²
3-4-5 bedrooms	60-75m ²

A garden of 25 square metres should be considered the minimum for inner urban infill dwellings, consideration may be given to further slight reduction if the site is difficult, is on a road frontage, is less than 10m deep and design is of a high standard.

Where appropriate a condition may be put on permissions requiring that no additional development whatsoever take place within the curtilage of each house save with a prior grant of permission, notwithstanding the exempted development provisions of the Local Government (Planning and Development) Regulations 2001 (or any amendment or replacement of said Regulations).

Innovative layouts may contain a combination of private and semi-private spaces in courtyard layouts. It may be considered appropriate to accept the sum of the area of both spaces as satisfying the private open space requirement for these dwellings.

Public Open Space

Open space in housing estate areas shall normally be based on a standard of 15% minimum of gross site area. The open space provision should be on a hierarchical system distributed throughout the housing area, ranging from small children's play areas, located in sight of their homes to larger areas where recreation and games can be facilitated.

Regard should be given to "Residential Density Guidelines" (DoELG, 1999). Standards will be divided between qualitative and quantitative and policy and standards in this regard are scheduled in section 2.3, Housing. Further advice is contained in appendix 3, Residential Layout.

Internal Standards for Apartments

The Planning Authority will have regard to standards scheduled in the 'Social Housing: Design Guidelines', (Dept. of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 1999) and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments - and as amended, in the assessment of the quality and adequacy of residential layout.

The recommended minimum floor areas and standards for apartments are as follows:

Minimum overall apartment floor areas

One bedroom	45 sq m (38 sq m)*
Two bedroom	73 sq m (55 sq m)*
Three bedrooms	90 sq m (70 sq m)*

* Figures in brackets refer to 1995 guidelines

Minimum aggregate floor areas for living/dining/kitchen rooms, and minimum widths for the main living/dining rooms

Apartment type	Width of living/dining room	Aggregate floor area of living / dining / kitchen area*
One bedroom	3.3 m	23 sq m
Two bed	3.6 m	30 sq m
Three bedrooms	3.8 m	34 sq m

* Note: An enclosed (separate) kitchen should have a minimum floor area of 6.5 sq. metres. In most cases, the kitchen should have an external window.

Minimum bedroom floor areas/widths

Type	Minimum width	Minimum floor area
Single bedroom	2.1 m	7.1 sq m
Double bedroom	2.8 m	11.4 sq m
Twin bedroom	2.8 m	13 sq m

* Note: Minimum floor areas exclude built-in storage presses.

Minimum aggregate bedroom floor areas

One bedroom	11.4 sq m
Two bedroom	11.4 + 13 sq m = 24.4 sq m
Three bedrooms	11.4 + 13 + 7.1 sq m = 31.5 sq m

Minimum storage space requirements

One bedroom	3 sq m
Two bedrooms	6 sq m
Three or more bedrooms	9 sq m

Minimum floor areas for main apartment balconies

One bedroom	5 sq m
Two bedroom	7 sq m
Three bedroom	9 sq m

Private Open Space for Apartments, Duplexes and Flats

The provision of some private open area increases amenity of apartment living thereby making them more sustainable. For this reason, the provision of some private gardens, suitably landscaped, should be included in new apartment developments. Courtyards, terraces/patios, balconies and roof gardens, particularly in the inner urban areas should be considered in the design of new apartment developments, where it is not practicable to provide a private garden.

To ensure that apartments, duplexes and flats have adequate private space the following standards, as set down in the Residential Density Guidelines (DOE LG, 1999), will apply.

To ensure that apartments, duplexes & flats have adequate private space the following standards, as set down in the Residential Density Guidelines (DOE LG, 1999), and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for Apartments - Consultation Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities, January 2007 and as amended will apply:

Inner Urban/Town Centres:

1 bedroom apartment: min. of 10m² private open space

2-3 bedroom apartment: min. of 15-20m² private open space

The shortfall in provision shall be made up in the form of communal space.

Outer suburban areas:

1 bedroom apartment: min. of 20m² private open space

2-3 bedroom apartment: min. of 30-40m² of private open space

In outer suburban areas private space maybe in the form of communal gardens or courtyards.

Landscaping

Trees and shrubs help blend new houses and building into the landscape and enhance the amenity, aesthetic quality and wildlife value of a development. Where possible, existing trees and fences/hedgerows should be preserved and incorporated into the design. Detailed proposals providing for a mix of both hard and soft landscaped areas should form part of the estate development application. In the interests of sustainable development, existing trees or hedgerows should be retained. Additional planting should be selected from native species. Applicants should refer to Council Publications in this regard.

Phasing of large development

In large developments the Planning Authority will seek phasing programmes. The phasing can be by number of units over a certain time period, or on completion of a particular area of a development. Commencement of any next phase will not be permitted until all services and infrastructures are completed to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority.

The Planning Authority may condition that no houses in a development shall be occupied until services to each house has been completed and are operational.

Taking in charge

Generally, individual phases of development will not be taken in charge, only the entire completed development will be considered. In any applications to have a development taken in charge, the Council will have regard to its policy document 'Taking in charge policy for private housing developments' prepared by Westmeath County Council.

Parking

Car parking for detached and semi-detached housing should be within the house site. Car parking for apartments and detached terraced housing should be in informal groups overlooked by housing units. The visual impact of large areas of car parking should be reduced by the judicious use of screen planting, low walls and the use of textured or coloured paving for parking bays.

Dwelling 4+ bedroom units	2 spaces per dwelling
Dwelling/Apartment 1-3 bedroom units	1 space per unit
Visitor Parking	1 visitor parking space for every 3 residential units

Road design & layout

Major Access Roads Main link within housing areas serving 100-300 residential units. Speeds should be physically constrained by the road layout between 20mph and 30mph.

Minor access Roads Generally serve small groups of houses, up to 50 dwellings. Speeds physically constrained by road layout to 20mph. Some of these will have a shared surface for vehicles and other road users. The careful positioning of buildings, landscaping and the use of different materials can help to reinforce the need to reduce speed and reduce the dominance of the motor vehicles.

(Source DoEHLG, Department of Transport and Dublin Transportation Office 'Traffic Management Guidelines 2002).

3.2 ENTERPRISE AND EMPLOYMENT AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT**Development Considerations**

Enterprise, employment and commercial developments on greenfield sites will be required to satisfy minimum requirements for design regarding location, layout, finishes, access, tree planting and landscaping, boundary treatment, water supply, drainage, and effluent disposal.

In addition, sufficient space shall be reserved within the curtilage of the sites for parking of all employees and visitors cars and for the loading and unloading of vehicles. Parking should be integrated in the overall design layout and expanses of parking should be screened by development or broken by planting and landscaping.

It is intended that such developments should leave one-third of the site free from buildings and that adequate rear access to business premises be made. The Council shall require that adequately screened onsite storage be provided for raw materials, waste products and finished goods.

The Council will require that the design of structures be of a good standard and compatible with the design of adjacent structures in terms of building line, heights, roof design, proportions, window design, materials etc., and will consider the preparation of a Design Guide for Industrial Estates during the Plan period.

The Council does not favour the splitting of occupancy on serviced sites and will consider the designation of sites for smaller cluster/inclusion units.

The Council will require full details of the nature of and processes involved in industrial activities together with the means of dealing effectively with effluents, noise, solid waste and gas emissions if relevant.

The Council will encourage the option of living over commercial or retail developments, particularly in central areas.

The Council will, in dealing with applications for industrial development, take account of relevant provisions of the Regulations on Environmental Impact Assessment (SI 349/89) and where relevant, the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992, in relation to integrated pollution control licensing.

Facilitation of Enterprise and Employment and Commercial Development

The Council will be prepared to use its powers of site assembly where appropriate to facilitate desirable development for industrial and commercial use.

Site Coverage

It is an objective of the Planning Authority to seek to achieve the following standards with regard to new development in the built up commercial areas of the town:

- It is desirable that an adequate proportion of sites be left without covered structures for off loading, air circulation, refuse storage etc., generally 20% of sites being developed for commercial or institutional or industrial purposes will be required to be left uncovered.
- A maximum plot ratio of 1:2 will be imposed. Plot ratio is defined as the gross floor area of buildings on a site divided by the gross site area. Provision of rear access to business premises may also be required. As a general rule the Council will favour industrial activity characterised by low water and energy consumption and minimal waste production.

Mixed Use Developments

In considering mixed-use developments within the areas identified as appropriate in the Town, the Town Council will apply the mechanism detailed in Part 2.2 of the Plan to secure an appropriate mix of uses.

Childcare

Childcare facilities shall comply with the provisions of 'Childcare Facilities, Guidelines for Planning Authorities.' Childcare facilities are a key element in the provision of sustainable communities and in this regard the Councils policy statement is scheduled in Part 2.6 of the Plan.

In relation to all applications for childcare facilities, the information which should be submitted (as a minimum) is as follows:

- (i) Nature of the facility.
 - Full day care
 - Sessional
 - Drop In
 - After School Care
- (ii) Numbers of children being catered for and number of staff (part time and full time).
- (iii) Parking provision for both customers and staff.
- (iv) Proposed hours of operation.
- (v) Open space provision and measures for management of same.

Petrol Filling Stations

Regard shall be had to the Retail Planning Guidelines, (DOELG, 2005) and the County Retail Strategy when proposing such developments.

Proposals for petrol stations shall comply with the requirements of the Foras Forbatha document RT 181 Geometric Design Guidelines (Intersections at Grade, 1986) and the document Design Manual for roads and Bridges National Roads Authority (2000) along with the Dangerous Substances Regulations SI 311 (1979).

Petrol filling stations can provide a wide range of retail goods in an associated shop. These shops should in general remain ancillary to the use of the site as a petrol filling station. A shop of up to 100m² is considered acceptable when associated with a petrol filling station. Above this threshold, the sequential test approach will be applied, i.e. the retail element of the development should be assessed by the planning authority in the same way as would an application for a retail development (without petrol filling facilities) in the same location.

New petrol filling stations and refurbished existing stations will be required to have a high quality of overall design and architectural layout to ensure an attractive environment, which integrates into its surroundings. Standard corporate designing will have to be modified as required by local circumstances. The forecourt canopy should be integrated into the overall design, and sited so that it does not dominate the surrounding building.

Petrol stations will not generally be permitted adjoining residential areas, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that no significant damage to residential amenities will occur by reason of factors such as noise, visual obstruction, safety considerations or fumes and smells. Hours of operation may be limited in residential areas. Car washing and turbo-drying facilities are to be sited so as not to interfere with residential amenities.

Design and Layout:

- a) A minimum frontage of 30m within the 60kmp/h (40mph) speed limit and 45m in other speed limits areas.
- b) A minimum distance of 7m from the pump island to the road boundary.
- c) Two access points between 7-9m wide, with a minimum junction radius of 10.7m.
- d) A min distance of 50m from entrance to nearest major junction and 25m to nearest minor junction.
- e) A footpath of 2m wide with 0.5m high wall along front boundary.
- f) A petrol/water interceptor to the surface to the surface water drainage.
- g) A scheme of landscaping.
- h) All new petrol stations must be laid out in such a manner that vehicles are re-fuelled, and can wait to be re-fuelled, clear of the adjoining roadway, thus access shall be designed to give best visibility.
- i) The layout of new or redeveloped petrol filling stations shall permit safe access for delivery tankers up to 15.5m in length, and an adequate off road area shall be provided for parking these vehicles safely without obstructing access to pumps while fuel is being delivered to the petrol filling station.
- j) Forecourt lighting including canopy should be limited to that which is necessary for the safe operation of the petrol filling station but external lighting should be diverted away from the public roadway to prevent a traffic hazard and so as not to interfere with amenities of adjoining buildings.

Automatic Teller Machines

The provision of automatic teller machines will be strictly monitored having regard to the need to protect the character of the relevant building and to allow the normal function of the footpath. The Council would seek to minimise the impact of these machines by not allowing canopies and encouraging the provision of lobby facilities.

3.3 PROTECTED STRUCTURES

Good design and conservation go hand and hand. They both recognise that the historic environment is a precious asset that must be conserved for future generations. However, this is not to say that historic environments cannot change. Good conservation ensures that important buildings and spaces continue to have contemporary relevance and vitality. Good design learns from the past and respects it in developing policies and proposals for new buildings and refurbishment. Together they both strive to create diverse and stimulating environments.

Extension or Alteration to a Recorded Protected Structure

The Council will normally only grant consent to proposals for the extension or alteration of a Protected Structure where all the following criteria are met:

- (a) The essential character of the structure and its setting are retained and its features of special interests remain in situ, intact and unimpaired.
- (b) The works proposed make use of traditional and/or sympathetic structure materials and techniques which match or are in keeping with those found on the structure.
- (c) The architectural details (e.g. doors, gutters, and windows) match or are in keeping with the structure.

Development Affecting the Setting of a Recorded Protected Structure

The Council will not normally permit development, which would adversely affect the setting of a Protected Structure. Development proposals will normally only be considered appropriate where all the following criteria are met:

- (a) The detailed design respects the Protected Structure in terms of scale, height, massing and alignment.
- (b) The works proposed make use of traditional or sympathetic structure materials and techniques which respect those found on the structure.
- (c) The nature of the use proposed respects the character of the setting of the structure.

Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA'S) and Townscape Character

- (i) New Development in an Architectural Conservation Area:

The Council will normally only permit development proposals for new buildings, alterations, extensions and changes of use in, or which affects the setting of an Architectural Conservation Area where all the following criteria are met:

- (a) The development preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the area.
- (b) The development is in sympathy with the characteristic built form of the area.
- (c) The scale, form, materials and detailing of the development respects the characteristics of adjoining buildings in the area.
- (d) The development does not result in environmental problems such as noise, nuisance or disturbance which would be detrimental to the particular character of the area.
- (e) Important views within, into and out of the area protected.
- (f) Trees and other landscape features contributing to the character or appearance of the area are protected.

3.4 SHOPFRONTS

Traditional shop front designs and nameplates over shop windows should be preserved. The Council will require that new shop front designs be in keeping with the existing character and traditional form of the streetscapes of the Town except where contemporary built form requires otherwise.

- Projecting signs should be of 2.4m clearance above street level
- Internally illuminated fascias will not be permitted
- Internally illuminated signs shall be restricted
- Illumination of fascia signage, shopfronts or distinctive architectural features should be discreet and limited to spotlighting, up-lighting or disguised minimalist strip lighting

- Product advertising and permanent canopies shall not be permitted.

The Planning Authority shall encourage good shopfront design in new shopfronts and shall actively pursue the replacement of existing poor quality shopfronts. Recent trends in shop front design have shown a preference for the traditional timber shopfront and the Planning Authority shall continue to encourage such types of development. Good modern design shopfronts will also be encouraged where appropriate. *An illustrative Advice Note will be produced during the plan period, see also 'Old Shopfronts' (ENFO Action Sheet15).*

The design of a new shopfront should relate to the architectural characteristics of the building of which it forms part. Such features as existing arches, stringcourses, plaster detailing or existing fascias and brackets should be considered in the new design and new internal alterations or proposed advertising must not interfere with such details.

If aluminium is used it should be anodised or treated in an appropriate colour. Athlone Town Council will consider developments leaving exposed stonework provided:

- i). The location is deemed suitable
- ii). Planning permission is obtained and
- iii). Good building practice is observed.

Wholesale removal of rendering along a streetscape is not encouraged and only focal buildings are considered appropriate for this treatment. Where there are elements of the original shopfront framework remaining, these should be retained in order to help integration of the new shopfront with the building as a whole.

New shopfront design must respect the scale and proportioning of the streetscape by maintaining the existing scale of development along the street and respecting the appropriate plot width. Large expanses of undivided glass will generally not be permitted. Elevational modelling and vertical proportioning should break up long runs of horizontal facades. The uses of fascias, pilasters and stall risers are means to achieve this.

Fascia panels should be provided as an integral part of the shopfront and should be of a depth appropriate to the size of the building and the proportion and the length of the shopfront. The construction of fascias linking two or more buildings, which have different architectural identities, is generally unacceptable. The construction of fascias extending above the level of the first floor windowsills and the obscuring and defacing of windows or other architectural details such as string course, friezes and cornices, shall not be permitted.

It is desirable to provide a stall riser on shopfronts of at least 300 – 600mm in height for visual reasons and to provide protection from fouling by animals, splashing from feet of passers-by and security. This should be executed in a durable material. The use of the public footpath for security stanchions or roller shutter fittings shall not be permitted.

Corporate image shopfronts will not necessarily be acceptable as compatibility with individual buildings and streetscape is considered more important than company demands for uniformity.

The use of plastic canopies over windows shall be discouraged, except where shading of a window is required. In this case the traditional rectangular awning shall be considered suitable.

Security Screens

The installation of security shutters can visually destroy and deaden the shopping street at night and thereby detract from the environment of the environs. It is a policy of the Council to discourage the use of such shutters and to ensure the removal of unauthorised ones.

Where security shutters are considered to be essential, the Council may permit them provided they match the following criteria:

- (a) They must be of the open grill type
- (b) They must be painted to match the shop front colour scheme

- (c) They must be located together with their associated housing behind the window display or behind the glazing.

The provision of roll down external screens will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances.

3.5 ADVERTISING AND SIGNAGE

The Council recognises the importance of the role of well-located and sympathetically designed advertising, to contribute to the character and vitality of a commercial unit or area. However, by design, scale, location, proliferation or ancillary issues such as manner of advertising, signage has the ability to seriously injure the visual qualities of an area or in some cases pose a hazard to motorists through distraction.

Advertising Hoardings/Billboards

In general the Council will not look sympathetically on applications for nationwide hoardings as saturation point has been reached in the Town. Excessive outdoor advertising will be strictly controlled. Such advertising will not be permitted in the following locations.

- Close to a listed building, a public open space or an important view.
- In predominantly residential areas, especially on prominent gable walls.
- Where a proliferation of such signage already exists.
- On street elevations.
- Where they may cause a road hazards.
- Where it is considered there may be a detrimental visual implication.

Where such advertising could perform a role in screening off derelict or obsolete areas thus improving the overall visual amenities of these areas favourable consideration may be given to applications for temporary permission for signage which performs this function. Such proposals should not interfere with the desirability of the ultimate re-development of such areas.

Local Advertising

The importance of local advertising in the economy of Athlone and County Westmeath is recognised. Such advertising can play an important role in enabling the identification of a particular trade or service outlet or tourist facility. Local advertising structures can be segregated into two specific categories; 'on-premises local advertising' and 'remote local advertising.'

The special needs of hotels and guest-houses for directional signs is catered for by licensing fingerpost signs.

On-Premises Local Advertising

Applications for this type of local advertising will be assessed on merit having regard to the following points:

- Signs on free-standing hoarding are undesirable.
- Size and scale of signs shall not be in conflict with those on existing structures in the vicinity.
- Projecting signs should generally be limited on a streetscape and be at fascia level.
- Structures will not be allowed above the eaves or parapet level on the buildings.
- Signs should not interfere with windows or other features of the façade, they should not project above the skyline or outside the general bulk of the building.
- Does not obscure architectural features such as cornices or window openings.
- Advertising signs erected parallel to a road or street are preferable to those projecting at angles thereto.
- Signs which compete with road signs or otherwise cause traffic hazard shall not be permitted.
- Advertising signs are undesirable in residential areas.
- Flashing reflectorised or glitter-type signs will not be permitted.
- Solid block or painted lettering will be preferred to hollow plastic or neon type signs.

- Traditional sign writing will be encouraged.
- Advertising signs of good quality and design which enhance and complement the streetscape will be encouraged
- A plethora of advertising signs which cause visual clutter on buildings or streetscape will be discouraged
- Is sympathetic in design and colouring both to the building on which they will be displayed and their surroundings.
- Shopfront advertising should be designed as integral part of the shop front and not left as an afterthought.

The Planning Authority will require commercial interests and especially multiple outlet groups to adjust the use and scale of their corporate image-advertising logo to respect the scale and design of adjacent properties and streetscapes

Modern approaches to advertising such as internal window signs will be considered.

Fingerpost Signs

The erection of finger post signs will require a licence from the Planning Authority and should comply with the following:

- Directional signs for major tourist attractions and community facilities will be considered but product advertising will not be permitted.
- Signs must be of a standard size and colour and where permitted shall be provided by the licensee but will be erected by the Council.

For Hotels, Guesthouses & Industrial/Commercial Premises

- Each sign shall be a finger-post sign of standard dimensions (i.e. 950mm x 288mm) with white lettering on a brown background with a white trim.
- The sign shall be erected on an existing road-sign pole where this is available, or otherwise on a pole of the same type specially erected.
- Signs shall not be permitted beyond a distance of 10km from the premises.
- A maximum of two signs may be permitted in respect of any establishment on a local Road which connects to more than one Regional Route.
- Signs will not be permitted on national roads.
- In addition to the initial sign, further signs will be permitted at intersections along the route of the County Road as necessary.
- A sign shall be permitted only at a junction between a County or private road and another National/Regional Road, or at an entrance leading off a County or private road.
- Signs shall not be permitted at a junction between two National Routes or two Regional Routes or between a National Route and a Regional Route where the maximum speed limit applies. A maximum number of six signs shall be permitted on a single pole at any junction.
- Where appropriate, a sign may be permitted subject to a condition that if there is a further application in respect of a sign for another facility at the same junction, the Planning Authority may require the first sign to be removed and replaced by a joint sign advertising both facilities. This requirement is subject to the overall limitation of six signs as defined above.

The foregoing, with the exception of the first item, will operate in the assessment of applications for the erection of directional signs for other services/facilities such as garden centres. Each sign shall be a fingerpost sign of standard dimensions (i.e. 950mm x 288mm) with dark brown lettering on a white background with a dark brown trim.

The basic development management principal in this regard is to reduce visual environmental clutter and to meet the needs of basic necessities thus improving the overall quality of the physical environment and legibility of the Town.

The Control of Advertisements on a Protected Structure or in Architectural Conservation Areas

The Council will strictly control advertising on a Protected Structure or in Architectural Conservation Areas and Areas of Townscape Character and will produce a guidance leaflet for premises owners and potential applicants.

3.6 PARKING STANDARDS

It will generally be required that developments that are residential, commercial, industrial or otherwise, shall comply with the parking standards detailed in the following table.

The Council shall seek to control the provision of parking in town centres and has a policy to encourage alternatives to car commuting. Within designated central town locations a lower standard of car parking provision shall apply as detailed in column four, where applicable.

Table 11 Parking Standards

		Town Council Area	Designated Area
Land Use	Unit	Space /Unit	Space/Unit
Dwelling 4+ Rooms	Dwelling 4+ Rooms	2.00	n/a
Dwelling	Dwelling	1.00	
Flat	Dwelling	1.00	
Shopping	100m ² gross floor area	6.0	3
Retail Warehousing	100m ² gross floor area	3.0	3
Cash & Carry	100m ² gross floor area	2.00	1.00
Manufacturing	100m ² gross floor area	2.00	1.00
Warehousing	100m ² gross floor area	1.5	1
Office	100m ² gross floor area	3.00	1.5
Bank/ Financial Institutions	100m ² gross floor area	5.00	2.5
Library	100m ² gross floor area	3.00	1.5
Lounge, bar, function room, ballroom	100m ² gross floor area	20.00	10.00
Restaurant	100m ² gross floor area	10.00	5.00
Take-away	Unit	5.00	2.5
Hotel/Guest House	Bedroom	1.00	1.00

School (Primary or secondary)	Classroom	1.00	0.5
College (tertiary)	Lecturer/Administrator	1.00	0.5
	Student	0.25	
Church	Seat	0.33	0.10
Hospital	Bed	0.33	0.10
Nursing Home	Bed	0.33	n/a
Clinics and Group Medical Practises	Consulting room	3.00	1.5
Sports Hall/Club	100m ² gross floor area, plus each court	2.00/2.00	1.5/1.5
Cinema, theatre, Stadium auditorium	Seat	0.20	0.10
Childcare	Employee	1.00	0.5
	Child	1 set down area per 5 children.	

The Town Centre Parking Standards, will apply in the following 'designated areas':

- The area west of the river centred on Connaught St., O'Connell St., High St., Main St., Castle St., Pearse St., and east of the river centred on Church St: Church St., Mardyke St., and Irishtown Upper; and extending northwards as far as St Kieran's Terrace and Grace Park Road and the Railway line and southwards as far as Inis Oir, as shown on the Athlone objectives map.
- In addition for small development in town centres (e.g. small extensions) the planning authority will exercise discretion in relation to car parking requirements and in some circumstances no parking requirement will apply, in the interests of encouraging town centre development.

Required Dimensions

Car Parking Bay 5m x 2.5m (end-on) 6m x 2.5m (parallel to kerb)

Loading Bay 15m x 3m (HGV) 6m x 3m (Small Van)

Circulation Aisle 6m in width.

Table 12: Cycle Parking Standards

TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDED CYCLE PARKING PROVISION		
	1 SHEFFIELD STAND PLUS EITHER 1 SPACE PER CAR PARKING SPACES.	OR 1 SPACE PER Y SQ.M GROUND FLOOR AREA
	X	Y
Schools		
Primary	-	500
Secondary	-	300
University	3	200
Hospital	14	700
Retail	14	550
Housing (at ground floor)		
Normal	2	150
Student	1	100
Sheltered	10	450
Health Centres	14	350
Offices	14	700
Hotels	14(staff)	
Pubs/Restaurants	14	140
Fast Food Outlets	8	70
Cinemas/Theatres/Sports	14	450
Leisure Centres/Sports	10	300
Factories/Warehouses	14	850

3.7 TELECOMMUNICATIONS

An efficient telecommunications system is important in the development of the economy. However, in considering location requirements, the Planning Authority will take the following factors outlined by the department of the Environment and Local Government's Planning Guidelines for Telecommunications Antennae and Supports Structures (1996); The Council will be concerned to ensure the protection of public health and the preservation of residential and visual amenity and to strike a fair balance between the rights of individual citizens and the general good.

- Telecommunication installations will not be favoured in residential areas, near schools, on land on which development may be restricted or prevented for amenity reasons or in parts of the town centres which are architecturally important.
- A minimum distance of approximately 100metres shall be provided between mobile communications masts/antennae and residential areas/schools/hospitals. This requirement shall not apply in the case of planning applications relating to sites where planning permission for such development has previously been granted.
- Co-location agreements are desirable for the granting of planning permission. Where new facilities are proposed applicants will be required to satisfy the Council that they have made a reasonable effort to share facilities or to locate facilities in clusters.
- Planning permission for telecommunications antennae and support structures shall be for a temporary period of not more than five years.
- As part of the planning application, operators should furnish a statement of compliance with the International Radiation Protection Association (IRPA) Guidelines (Health Physics, vol. 54, no.1, Jan 1988) or the equivalent European Pre-standard 50166-2, which has been conditioned by the licensing arrangements with the Department of Transport, energy and Communications, and to furnish that an installation of the type applied for complies with the above guidelines.

3.8 RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural Housing Design

It is the Council's intention to enable and enhance new development in the countryside to be absorbed in a sustainable way. Development should reflect the vernacular aspects in design and treatment to ensure a respect for the local and traditional context, with minimal intrusion on the landscape and utilising appropriate design, scale and materials and use of planting and landscaping.

Westmeath County Council have produced a supplementary design guideline, the 'Westmeath Rural Design Guidelines' to guide and advise rural development, the Council will have regard to the guidelines in the assessment of rural residential proposals.

Plot Size

The scale of the building should be appropriate to its settings. Larger houses and their resultant form, whilst they may be visible should be contained in the landscape, avoiding obtrusiveness. The size of site is an important factor. A small, typical, half-acre site is unsuitable in a country setting for a larger house. The house needs space to fit.

Development Management Procedures in Areas of High Amenity

The extended Town Council boundary now incorporates an area of high amenity that extends south from Lough Ree. Areas of High Amenity are so designated having regard to their amenity and recreational potential and the extent of the Lough Ree HAA is detailed on the objectives map detailing natural heritage areas.

The Council will prohibit housing developments, which are obviously urban-generated or speculative ventures in designated Areas of High Amenity. The Council's policies in relation to Areas of High Amenity are as follows:

- Development shall not be permitted where it would be injurious to or detract from the natural amenities of these areas, siting, design and layout of all new development shall be strictly controlled.
- A number of public lakeside resorts throughout the County have been developed for the enjoyment of the community and a further number are planned. Development on the approaches

to these public areas or immediately adjoining them will be prohibited where such development would be likely to detract from the natural amenity, which is their basic attraction.

- The lake islands in the County are considered to form most significant landscape features. Some of these are of recreational amenity value while others are of scientific importance because they contain archaeological remains or form valuable habitats for flora or fauna. Further development of a non-essential nature will in general be specifically excluded from these locations while conservation works undertaken either by the Office of Public Works or the Forestry and Wildlife Services will be actively encouraged and assisted.
- The Planning Authority will seek to secure the protection of a proper environment for mayfly life around those lakes which are important from the point of view of angling.
- The Lough Ree Area of High Amenity adjoins similar amenity areas administered by other Planning Authorities and it is the Council's intention to seek the closest co-operation with such authorities in the protection and development of these areas.
- The Council will seek, in association with Failte Ireland East & Midlands Region, to provide the public facilities required to allow the Areas of High Amenity to be utilised for recreational and touristic purposes.
- The Council shall protect existing public rights of way in the Areas of High Amenity and shall undertake to create new rights of way and extend existing ones where it is considered desirable and practicable.
- Co-operation with the Forestry and Wildlife Services will be sought in the establishment of access ways, pony tracks, nature trails, etc. with a view to opening up state forests for recreational use compatible with forestry requirements.
- The Council considers that navigable waterways should be kept open and assistance will be given in the achievement of this aim where practicable.
- The Council will prohibit housing developments which are obviously urban-generated or speculative ventures in the Area of High Amenity. The types of permissible development and the development management provisions applicable to the High Amenity Area is as follows:

1. Desirable recreational, leisure and tourist related development.	Suitable sites and in accordance with the proper planning and development of the area. (Specific Area identified in Lough Ree Area of High Amenity)
2. Exempted Development Check views and prospects.	Check views and prospects.
3. Farm Development	Check views and prospects. Restriction on location, design and use of materials. Control of effluent discharge and strict pollution control. Screen planting.
4. Renovations and extensions to existing development.	Restriction on design and use of materials. Control of boundary treatment. Improve access and provide off-carriageway parking where possible. Screen planning conditions to be imposed. Selected planting of front boundaries.

5. Bona Fide Replacement Housing	Existing residence to be demolished or restricted in use, i.e. agricultural use or for purposes incidental to enjoyment of the dwelling. Restriction on design, siting and materials used. Control of boundary treatment and landscaping to a high quality. Restriction of tree felling and scrub clearance. Restriction on change of use after development is completed. Check necessity for creation of right of way. Strict control of possible disturbance to areas of scientific interest and woodlands. Subject to restriction on first occupancy whereby the applicant is the first occupant.
6. Housing for the immediate family (son/daughter) of established residents living on landholdings, who demonstrate housing need and have long-term intrinsic links with the area. The entire landholding will be demonstrated to have been in the resident's ownership since before the adoption of the Draft County Development Plan 2000. No more than two additional dwellings to be permitted on any such holding.	Provided there is no alternative site on farm outside of Area of High Amenity. Restriction on design, siting and materials used on construction. Control of boundary treatment. Development to be landscaped to high quality. Restriction on tree felling and scrub clearance. Restriction on change of use after development is completed. Check necessity for creation of right of way. Strict control of possible disturbance to areas of scientific interest and woodlands. Subject to restriction on first occupancy where the applicant is the first occupant
7. Access and essential facilities for existing land amid water based activities	Strict control of siting and design of structures. Landscaping to be of highest quality. Public access to be maintained.
8. Conversion of buildings to hotel use.	Use encouraged on suitable sites.

Access onto National Routes

No new accesses will be permitted on to dual carriageway National Routes.

No new accesses will be permitted onto national routes outside 50km/hr or 60km/hr zones of speed restriction.

Housing development requiring access onto national routes outside 50km/hr or 60km/hr zones of speed restriction will be resisted.

A Road Safety Audit is required for all development that incorporates a proposal for a new access to a national road or where the development may give rise to an increase in traffic on an existing access to a national road. A transport assessment is required where a development gives rise to a significant increase in traffic. The County Council accept the need to severely restrict development along single carriageway National Routes in order to protect safety levels and operational efficiency and to safeguard the national investment in these roads.

It is policy to restrict access to national roads in order to protect the substantial investment in the national road network, to improve carrying capacity and safety and to prevent the premature obsolescence of the network.

Where existing roads are being dualled, existing accesses will in so far as is feasible be provided onto service roads, from which access can be gained to the dual carriageway at suitable safe locations.

Notwithstanding the above provisions, permission will not be granted in respect of sites which do not meet the normal criteria with regard to site size, percolation characteristics and sight distance.

3.9 FLOOD RISK AND PLANNING APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Development management

OPW Channels' are maintainable channels. The OPW requests that a 10m strip be retained from the top of the bank on both sides of these channels to allow for maintenance. This strip should not be paved or landscaped in a manner that would prevent access by maintenance plant.

'Drainage District Channels' are maintainable channels under the drainage districts and are maintainable by the local authority. Similar facilities for maintenance as required by the OPW may be appropriate at the discretion of the Local Authority

Development Assessment Criteria

The Council is committed to avert insofar as possible, the threat of flooding in new developments, to minimise the impact of structures and earthworks on flood plains and river flow, and to reduce, insofar as possible, the rate and quantity of surface water run-off from all new developments.

It shall be required that development proposals are framed such as to address in an authoritative manner the following issues with regard to flood protection:

- To require that a Flood Impact Assessment be submitted with all significant development proposals where appropriate - to identify potential loss of floodplain storage and mitigation proposals to minimise flood risk and impact.
- To require a certificate from a 'suitably qualified competent person' that the development will not contribute to flooding, with planning applications for smaller scale development proposals as considered appropriate.
- To require developers to submit, prior to commencement, details of Sediment and Water Pollution Control, for the agreement of the Drainage and Environmental Departments as appropriate.
- New development proposals must, so far as is reasonably practicable, incorporate the maximum provision to reduce the rate and quantity of runoff; hard surface areas (car parks, etc.) should be constructed in permeable or semi-permeable materials, on site storm water ponds to store and / or attenuate additional runoff from the development should be provided soak-aways or French drains should be provided, to increase infiltration and minimize additional runoff.
- Where proposed development are adjacent to watercourses of a significant conveyance capacity, any proposed structures (including hard landscaping), must be set back from the edge of the watercourse to allow access for channel clearing/maintenance, (A setback of 5m-10m is required depending on the width of the watercourse).
- To reserve a strip of 10 metres from the top of the bank on both sides of "OPW Channels" to allow for maintenance. This strip should not be paved or landscaped in a manner that would prevent access by maintenance plant.

All proposals for development but especially those in floodplains and areas liable to flooding must, in so far as is reasonably practicable, incorporate sustainable design/construction measures to reduce the rate and quantity of runoff; for example:

- Hard surface areas (car parks, etc.), should be constructed in permeable or semi-permeable materials.
- On-site storm water ponds to store and/or attenuate additional runoff from the development should be provided.
- Soak-aways or French drains should be provided to increase infiltration and minimise additional runoff.

All new flood prevention or channel maintenance development must be designed and constructed to meet the following minimum flood design standards:

- For urban areas or where developments (existing, proposed or anticipated) are involved – The 100-year flood, i.e. the land could flood once in 100 years on average after drainage.
- For rural areas or where further developments (existing, proposed or anticipated) are not involved – 25 year flood i.e. the land could flood once in 25 years on average after drainage.

- Where streams, open drains or other watercourses are being culverted – the minimum permissible culvert diameter is 900mm. Access should be provided for maintenance as appropriate.

3.10 TOURISM APPRAISAL

Sustainable Tourism Planning Control Checklist

The following checklist is for applications for planning permissions for new development. The list can be applied to all new development including new tourism related development. For most applications a simple but honest assessment – yes or no – is all that is necessary.

Not all questions will be relevant to any particular application, but some or most will be. If the answers to these questions are mainly 'Yes', then the development proposal is likely to contribute to sustainability. Mainly 'No' answers suggest the proposal is likely to conflict with sustainability principles identified in the Plan.

1 Land, Buildings, Resources and Waste

- a. Is the proposal on a 'brownfield' (previously used) site or in existing vacant building (s)?
- b. Does the proposal use land, energy, water, soils, minerals and materials prudently? (E.g. Does it minimise land-take; does it incorporate energy/water saving devices; is it orientated to take advantage of sunlight; does it re-use other materials?).
- c. Does the development avoid floodplain?
- d. Have opportunities been taken to incorporate the use of renewable energy sources? (e.g. wind, hydro, solar, CHP).

2 Natural Environment – Landscape and Wildlife

- a. Are valuable wildlife habitats protected or enhanced? (e.g. designated sites, woods, hedges, wetlands).
- b. Will the proposal increase broad-leaved tree and hedge cover?
- c. Does the proposal safeguard landscape quality and retain open countryside? (In conjunction with a landscape character assessment).

3 Pollution and Climate Change

- a. Is the quality and volume of water safeguarded? (Ground-water, surface water and drinking water).
- b. Are air, noise and light pollution all prevented in the proposals?
- c. Has allowance been made for projected climate change impacts? (e.g. more storms, flooding, subsidence).

4 Transport and Access

- a. Are measures proposed to reduce the number of car or lorry journeys to the development?
- b. Is the development accessible to all modes of transport? (incl. walking, cycling, public transport).
- c. Is access available for all people? (incl. elderly and those with disabilities).

5 The Local Economy

- a. Does the proposal increase employment opportunities for local people?

- b. Will local goods and suppliers be used wherever possible so that income is re-circulated locally?

6 Local Needs and Local Views

- a. Will the development also help to meet other local/community needs (e.g. by supporting services).
- b. Have local people had a chance to contribute ideas or opinions?

7 Quality, Local Distinctiveness and Culture

- a. Is a high quality of building design and materials incorporated?
- b. Does the proposed design protect and enhance local heritage, diversity and distinctiveness?
- c. Will the development assist participation in – or access to – arts, culture and heritage?

Source: Future Footprints, Sustainability Southwest, UK (www.futurefootprints.org.uk)

3.11 DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Development Contribution Scheme:

The Council may when granting a permission under S 34 include a condition/s for requiring the payment of contributions in respect of public infrastructure and facilities benefiting development in its area and that is provided, or that is intended will be provided, by or on behalf of the local authority, in accordance with a Development Contribution Scheme made under S 48 (2) of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 2006.

Special Contribution:

The planning authority may in addition to the terms of a scheme, require the payment of a special contribution in respect of a particular development where specific exceptional costs not covered by a scheme are incurred by any local authority in respect of public infrastructure and facilities which benefit the proposed development, in accordance with a Development Contribution Scheme made under S 48 (2) (c) of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 2006.

Supplementary Development Contribution Schemes:

The planning authority may whenever appropriate, require by condition, payment of a contribution in respect of any public infrastructure service or project, in accordance with a Development Contribution Scheme made under S 49 (2) of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 2006.

- (a) Specified in a supplementary scheme made by the planning authority.
- (b) Provided or carried out, as may be appropriate, by a planning authority or pursuant to an agreement entered into by a local authority, any other person.
- (c) That will benefit the development to which the permission relates when carried out.